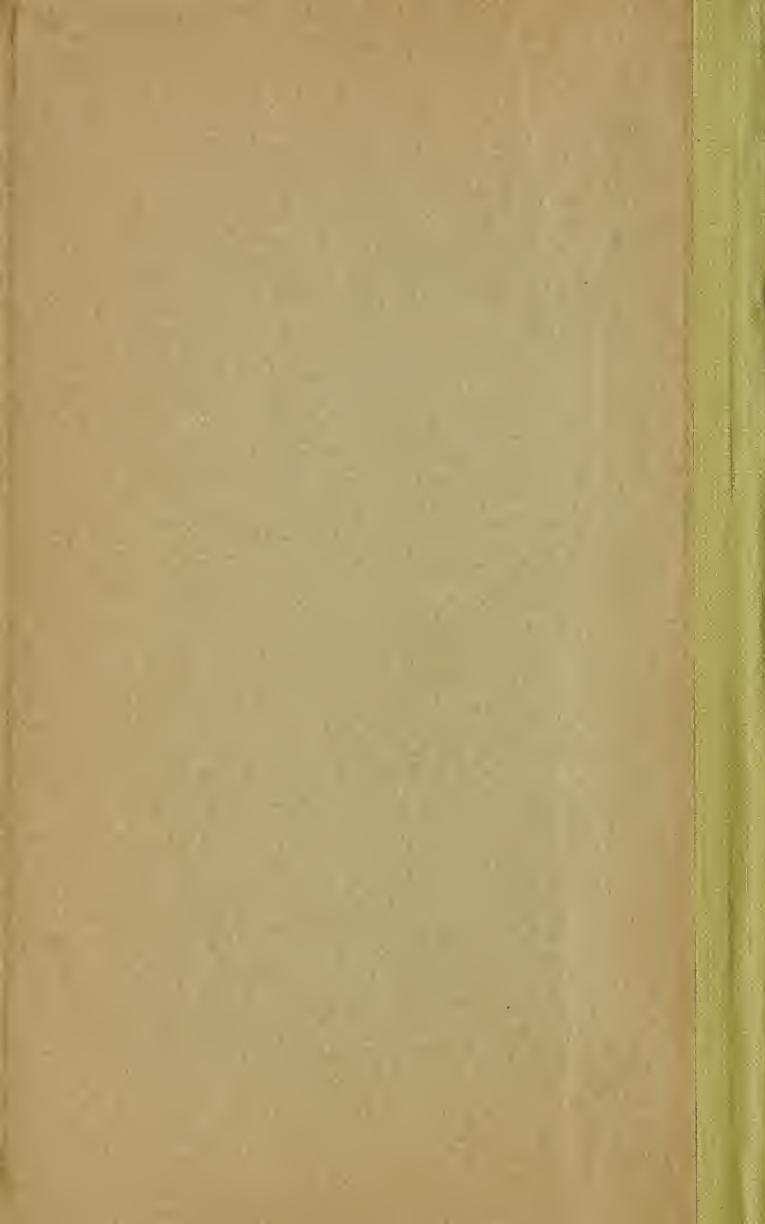


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"Great soft flakes fell round the homeless child as he seated himself on a heap of thin laths."

"REST COMES AT LENGTH."

Page 236.

Fighting the Fog;

OR,

EVERY DAY BATTLES.

BY

FIDELITY.

[pseud.]

FORTITER, FIDELITER, FELICITER.

New Edition.

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER AND BROTHERS,
530, BROADWAY.

1877-

22

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

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To

MY MOTHER,

WHOSE CAREFUL INSTRUCTION FIRST IMPRESSED HER CHILDREN

WITH THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING THE

Christian Warfare,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

Is lovingly inscribed.

066X290



CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
WARLIKE PREPARATIONS	1

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE HORSE-CHESTNUT.

Armed for Action	8
----------------------------	---

CHAPTER III.

ENSLAVED BY THE FOE.

Broken Bonds	28
------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD HOME.

Contented Cattie	45
----------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

FAINT-HEARTED.

Disquieted in Vain	58
------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

SORELY BESET.

Endure Hardness	71
---------------------------	----

CHAPTER VII.

POPE'S HOLLOW.

Friendless	PAGE 84
----------------------	---------

CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE OFFERINGS.

Giant Gain and Dwarf Grudge	99
---------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IX.

OVERCOME OF EVIL.

Heaven-laden	114
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

TOM STANTON'S SECRET.

Just this Once	126
--------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

JESSIE'S LESSON.

Knowledge Puffeth Up	139
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

DWARF GRUDGE DEFEATED.

Little Foes Cause Greater Woes	153
--	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND.

Many Mercies	165
------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

ON BOARD.

	PAGE
Not your Own	179

CHAPTER XV.

BROOKSMOUTH.

Only a Fragment	193
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVI.

DISAPPOINTED.

Pleasant Pastures	203
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Quit you like Men	222
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST FOE VANQUISHED.

Rest comes at Length	236
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE LESS.

Safe Home	249
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XX.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

Tried but Trustful	258
------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPER'S VICTORY.

Under a Usurper	PAGE 273
---------------------------	-------------

CHAPTER XXII.

ROLF DISAPPEARS.

Valiant for the Truth	296
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LITTLE PEACEMAKER.

What Have I to Do with Him?	301
---------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

SAD TIDINGS.

Yielding yet Yearning	312
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXV.

CLOUDY DAYS.

Jealous Zoe	324
-----------------------	-----

CHAPTER XXVI.

HAPPINESS AGAIN	337
---------------------------	-----



FIGHTING THE FOE.

CHAPTER I.

WARLIKE PREPARATIONS.

THE afternoon train sped swiftly along a steep embankment about a mile from the pretty village of Oxondown, looking in the distance like a phantom toy-like thing, till it vanished into a cutting and was lost to view, save for a cloudy wreath of white steam that marked its progress onwards. Presently it reappeared again, gliding with lessened speed beyond the wire paling that separated its iron road from the closely-mown lawn of Stanton Villa, where, crowded together in the large oriel window, no less than five excited faces, each above the other, like steps of stairs, were watching it eagerly.

“No waving of pocket-handkerchiefs!” exclaimed Augustus Stanton, the topmost of the five heads, looking ruefully down on his brothers and sisters.

“Stop a moment,” said Katie, the owner of the lowest face but one, “they may not have got them out in time.”

“Don’t wave yours, Alfie, you silly boy!” cried Ada, the second in height and age, looking angrily down on the youngest and most attractive countenance of all, as she snatched a little pink-bordered handkerchief rudely from his hand.

“There, it is gone,” said Tom, flattening his little snub nose against the window-pane to catch the last glimpse of the long

string of carriages before they were hidden from sight amongst the trees. "There is no hope of their coming by this train, at all events."

And the five children turned from the window and gathered round the fire.

In a large arm-chair, on one side of the hearth, sat a very old lady, bent and infirm, who, looking up at the disappointed faces, asked, "Have they not come?"

"No," said Ada, pushing little Katie from a low easy-chair that she might take it herself. "At least they did not wave anything as they passed the house, and papa always does."

"Perhaps *she* prevented him," suggested Tom.

"Very likely," said Augustus carelessly. "It is just what I should suppose her capable of."

"My dear ——" remonstrated the old lady.

"I have made up my mind to dislike her," returned Augustus with quiet determination.

"So have I," added Ada quickly. "I know she will try to domineer and order us about; but I flatter myself she will have some trouble with *me*."

"Indeed I fear so," sighed the old lady.

"Perhaps she may be nice and kind," observed Tom, looking round, doubtful as to how the surmise might be received.

It was hailed with a chorus of "No, no!" "That she won't!" "It's impossible!" &c. &c.

"I shall hate her equally, whether she proves kind or cross," shouted Augustus, raising his voice above the tumult. "I dare say she will be indulgent enough for the few hours papa is at home; but when she has us all to herself, then the conflict will begin!"

"I pity the poor young creature," interposed the old lady, shaking her head. "She can scarcely realize the charge she has undertaken; and then your father being ordered off at once to join his regiment is such a sad ending to their wedding tour."

"I am glad, at least, papa can come home for one night," said Tom.

"Poor young thing!" murmured the old lady compassionately, "only nineteen; coming to a strange home, and losing her husband next day, for no one knows how long. Ah, war is a sad thing—a cruel thing!"

"The poor young thing!" echoed Augustus with a derisive laugh. "If she doesn't like the charge of us all, why did she undertake it? I am sure she needn't have married papa unless she wished it; nobody wanted her, and nobody asked her."

"*He* asked her," said Tom.

"She might have refused."

"No one could refuse papa!" cried Katie, opening her large blue eyes in amazement. "Every one is sure to do what he asks them!"

"Then he needn't have asked her," said Augustus.

"It was high time he married somebody," observed the old lady, "to keep you all in order, and bring you up properly."

"I thought you did that, Aunt Charlotte."

"I have done my best," she answered wearily, "and you all grow more and more unruly every day. I only wish your new mamma was older. I trust she will be more severe and steady with you than I have been; you all need discipline sadly."

"Pooh!" cried Augustus scornfully; "I should like to see her try it—I should indeed. Look at me, children!" he continued, gazing proudly round on his youthful audience, "my watchword is to be war to the knife! Now we shall see who will conquer, she or I!"

"It shall be mine too," assented Ada.

"And mine," cried Tom.

"And mine too," added Katie.

Little Alfred looked gravely from one to the other. "Where is the war?" he enquired.

"Between us and our new mamma," exclaimed Augustus eagerly. "Look, Alfie, you must never listen when she speaks; and if she desires you to do anything, you must just do the

reverse; then, don't you see, she will find she can't manage us, and we shall win the battle!"

"It will be a grand victory," added Tom, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Children! children!" interrupted Aunt Charlotte's feeble, reproachful accents, "what a sad reception you are preparing for her and your dear papa."

"Not for papa. Oh, here comes the carriage! Empty, of course. I knew it would be. They won't come now till the late train. Let us go out and arm ourselves for the fray!"

They all rushed off, and dispersed about the grounds till the bell summoned them to tea; after which they scampered off to prepare for their father and step-mother's arrival; and in a short time they were all assembled in the drawing-room, looking so neat, nice, and demure, one would scarcely have recognized them as the same rude, noisy children.

Augustus lay back in his father's arm-chair, "arming himself for the fray," to judge by the scornful gleam in his eyes, and the mischievous smile that every now and then played round his lips. Ada stood before the large mirror, at the far end of the room, shaking out her long brown curls, and putting herself in various attitudes. Tom and Katie were busily engaged in rolling a skein of wool for old Miss Stanton, at whose feet sat little Alfred, gazing solemnly into the fire.

The room had a very pleasant, home-like appearance; the wood fire blazed and crackled cheerily, the lamps were lit, the shutters shut, and the curtains drawn.

Outside the oriel window the quiet moonlight lay white and silvery upon the well-kept lawn and pleasure-ground; the sky was deep blue, and almost cloudless, while here and there shone a glittering star.

The last train rushed by, the lurid light from the engine making the white steam gleam with a fiery glow as it mounted upwards in short puffs till lost in the trees.

And not very long afterwards a brougham rolled along the

silent road, and as it stopped at the gate of Stanton Villa, the moonbeams shone full on a frank, sun-burnt, soldier-like face, and a fair, sweet countenance, grave and pensive.

The carriage drew up at the door, and Captain Stanton jumped out; and while the children crowded into the entrance-hall, looking abashed and awkward, he carefully assisted his young wife to alight. Then came greetings in the lighted hall, the father drawing forward each child, and presenting them all to their step-mother. She smiled, and spoke a few soft words, so attractive to Alfred that he allowed his little hand to rest in hers as they entered the drawing-room; but the others still hung back, and stayed behind to compare notes.

"That *girl* our step-mother!" exclaimed Augustus with withering contempt. "Why I am nearly as tall as she is. I say, did she not seem in rather a funk when she first caught sight of us all?"

"Not a bit," said Tom sturdily; "and I tell you what, if there is war, it will be *deformed*, all on one side. Why she could not do battle with a spider."

"No one can judge at first sight," answered Augustus; "wait till she is alone with us by-and-by, when papa is gone."

"She isn't a bit pretty," simpered Ada; "her bonnet is not the fashionable shape."

"You girls always think of dress."

"Come," said Tom, "it is rude to stay outside like this."

"Please sir," interposed the coachman, touching his hat, "will you ask master what orders about the carriage to-morrow morning?"

Tom ran in, and presently returned.

"Papa is coming to speak to you himself, Jones. Come, Gus, Ada, Katie, he says we are to come in."

They entered the drawing-room very demurely, and somewhat bashfully, just as their father was leaving it.

"Go, children, and make acquaintance with your mamma," he said, as he passed them.

Their young step-mother was engaged in conversation with old Miss Stanton; Alfred was standing on the rug with his hands behind his back, gazing at her intently; in this the others followed his example, and stared at the stranger till even aunt Charlotte observed their rudeness, and told Augustus to go and enquire whether supper were nearly ready.

"I dare say you are half famished," said the kind old lady. "It is such a long journey from London; though much shorter now than in my young days, when we took three days by coach to reach it."

Mrs. Stanton smiled.

"We were not much more than three hours," she said.

"Well, I dare say you found three hours fatiguing enough, my dear; and now I am sure you would like to change your travelling-dress. Go and show the way, Ada love."

"Katie will go," said Ada listlessly.

But the little girl drew back.

"I know the way," said Alfred, raising his ingenuous face to the stranger's. "May I show it?"

"Do, my dear," said aunt Charlotte with a reproving glance at the two little girls; "and go to nurse then, it is your bedtime."

He left the room with his step-mother, and almost before they were out of ear-shot Augustus exclaimed, "There is Alfred going over to the enemy's side at the outset; what a jolly shame!"

"I would not bring her upstairs," said Ada proudly.

"Nor I," exclaimed Katie.

"I say it is really wrong," said Tom suddenly; "she has the nicest face I ever saw!"

"Tom had always a weakness for good looks," said Augustus sneeringly.

"I don't want to care for her if she is not to be liked," said Tom, nothing daunted; "but if she is, I shall lay down my sword at her feet."

"Do," returned Augustus scornfully; "you are not worthy to wield one."

Tom made some angry retort, and the war of words was at its height when Mrs. Stanton returned, almost immediately followed by her husband.

Then supper was announced, and being much later than usual, the children were all dismissed to bed; very reluctantly on their father's part, and with great indignation on theirs.

"The only night papa will be at home for ever so long," exclaimed Augustus, stopping short upon the staircase. "I say it's very hard and unjust."

"I scarcely blame papa," said Ada in a much-injured tone; "for it is very likely *she* asked him to send us off."

"Of course she did, just to get rid of us."

"Hush," whispered Tom in a warning tone, "here they come!"

All the four heads peeped through the banisters, and saw the trio coming across the hall beneath, Aunt Charlotte leaning on both as they gently supported her feeble frame, and guided her into the dining-room.

The little malcontents sat for some time disconsolately on the stairs; but after a long consultation, finding no sufficient excuse for reappearing downstairs, and fearing if they lingered their disobedience might be discovered, they all dispersed to their rooms.





CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE HORSE-CHESTNUT.

Armed for Action.

THE morning sun was shining brightly into the dining-room, where Ada sat alone before the tea-urn at the head of the breakfast-table. A letter was in her hand, which she turned round and round, examining the address and postmark. "I wonder who she hears from? perhaps her father; it is like a gentleman's handwriting."

She inspected it carefully again, and laid it aside as her three brothers came in together.

"I say," cried Augustus, showing his open hand, with two half-crowns glittering in his palm.

"Look what papa gave me just now."

"And to me, too," said Tom.

"And me," echoed little Alfred.

"Nothing for me?" cried Ada, looking mortified.

"No," said Augustus, winking aside to Tom. "He thought you didn't behave well last night."

"He never saw me!"

"Perhaps he heard——"

"Did *she* tell him that I was rude to her?"

"You are not to speak of her like that," said Tom decidedly; "you are to call her *mamma*, and speak to her politely."

"Yes," added Augustus, "papa called us all three into his dressing-room this morning, when Grimes was packing up his things, and he gave us a lecture on the subject."

"Why, did he really see anything last night?"

"Not a bit of it; he thinks us as good as gold; but he wants us to be as good as extra-refined gold—kind, dutiful, and obedient to her, and all that kind of thing, when he is away; and the fact is I promised."

"I hope you only promised for yourself then," said Ada irritably; "for I shall do just as I please."

"Of course I only spoke for myself."

"And do you mean to keep it?"

"I only promised to *try*, and if she lets me alone it won't be hard."

"And where is all the grand warfare that you were boasting about yesterday?"

"Oh, that will come off if she interferes with me; but should she make no inroads on my boundaries, I shall make none on hers."

"That is not carrying war into the enemy's country," said Tom; "you would only be acting in self-defence."

"I may be aggressive sometimes," said Augustus; "indeed it is highly probable."

"I challenged her to fight last night," said Ada proudly, "by refusing to go with her; you see I valiantly drew my sword the moment I saw the prospect of an attack."

"Yes, and you wounded her," added Tom; "I saw by her face that the blade struck home."

"What blade?" asked Alfred.

"The blade of the sword called *Hatred*."

"And Katie held up the helmet of Disobedience, and declined to go with her when desired by Aunt Charlotte."

"I am sure, Gus," said Ada majestically, "you need not talk of the sword Hatred, and the helmet Disobedience; for if she had invaded your territory last night, you would have thrown down your arms, and run away like a coward."

"*That* I shouldn't! How dare you say so! Just wait a day or two, and see whether a cannon-shot from me won't throw all your puny efforts into the shade!"

"Why don't you begin at once? You did nothing last night but stare."

"And is not *staring* a deadly-aimed shot from the rifle *Rudeness*?"

"It fell wide of the mark," said Ada scornfully. "Tell me, did you ask papa for a holiday to-day?"

"Yes; but he won't send down to ask for it; he leaves by the 10:55 train, so we should not see much of him even if we had one; besides to-day is Wednesday—our half."

"And so you actually promised him to call her *mamma*?"

"Yes; you would have done so yourself if you only heard papa talking as he did; besides you know we can't any of us remember our own mother, having been sent home from India while mere babies, which makes it all the easier."

"I have a dreamy remembrance of some one lying on a sofa in a large verandah."

"Yes," I have some hazy memories of the same kind; but perhaps it is only nurse's stories make us imagine it; for you were only a year old, and I between two and three, when we were sent home to Aunt Charlotte."

"I remember wearing black frocks when she died."

"Yes; that was soon after Alfie was born; papa and nurse brought him home. Oh, Katie (as the little girl entered the room), have you seen papa this morning?"

"Yes; and he gave me a whole five shillings: a large round silver one!"

"Then he certainly won't leave me out," said Ada brightening.

"He certainly will, if he sees you seated at the head of the table; you have no business there now, you know!"

Ada hastily changed her seat just as her father and stepmother came in, the latter looking very fair and fragile in the morning light. Ada's anxiety was relieved by her father accompanying his morning greeting with the gift of five bright shillings, and they all sat down to breakfast.

"This letter is for you," said Tom; "for you, mamma," he added, with a smiling glance towards his father.

"Thank you, dear," she said, making no remark about the envelope, which had been almost torn open by Ada's inquisitive fingers. "It is from Theodore," she added to her husband, when she had read it. "He says he will be ready to meet you at two o'clock, at Paddington."

"That's very satisfactory."

"And also," she added, with a soft blush and smile, "he says that Captain Monk thinks the war cannot possibly last more than a month; so that I shall soon have both you and him back again."

"Better not build on such hopes," said Captain Stanton, looking fondly at her; "it would be impossible to foretell the end of such a war as this."

She looked wistfully at him, but made no reply; and a moment or two afterwards he continued, "My train does not leave for an hour or more, so I thought of walking to Oxondown with the children; you had better not come, dear, you look tired, and unequal to exertion. I shall be back in a quarter of an hour." She quietly acquiesced, and immediately after breakfast the children set off with their father.

The boys' school was but a little way from the entrance gate, and wishing his three boys farewell at the school door, Captain Stanton walked on with his two little daughters.

"Well, my children," he said cheerfully, "you see I have brought you home a present, a *very* valuable one, which I expect you to keep with the greatest care."

"Oh yes, papa," cried Ada gratefully; "it was so good of you to think of giving us all so much!"

"My dear child you mistake me," said her father, laughing; "I gave you all a few shillings, because I had intended bringing you some little remembrance from London or Paris; but I had not one moment's time to choose them as we passed through. The most precious gift I leave with you, Ada, is your new

mamma; I trust you will treat her with deference, care, and attention, and soon learn to value her as she deserves."

Ada was silent.

"Has Augustus told you all I said to him this morning?"

"Yes, papa."

"Then I need not repeat it to you. I hope both my little girls will try to be good, helpful, and obedient; not only for my sake, or because you wish to please me when I shall be far away; but because there is One above, whom I trust you both know and love, who has commanded us to honour and obey all who bear rule, or are in authority over us; you will find if you begin to try from love to your Father in heaven, it will soon be made very easy to you by daily increasing love to your mamma."

"This is Miss Halton's school," cried Ada; "how short the way seemed to-day!"

"And here I must wish you good-bye," said their father in a tone of disappointment; then solemnly adding, as he embraced them, "God bless you both, my dear children, and grant us all to meet again on earth, if it be His will."

They wished him one more lingering farewell, and turned slowly and reluctantly into the house.

It was nearly one o'clock when the two little girls were released from their studies, and hastening home, met their brothers on the lawn.

"Well," cried Augustus, "I asked Grimes, and he tells me papa is gone."

"I wish he had missed the train," exclaimed Tom; "we have scarcely seen anything of him."

"I wish the war had not broken out just now," said Katie.

"There is no use in idle wishes," observed Augustus sententiously. "Let us make the most of our half holiday. What shall we do this afternoon?"

"Ought we to ask mamma?" suggested Tom.

"Certainly not," said Ada decidedly. "We always do what

we like on half holidays, and I shan't begin by giving up my liberty."

"We might come in," said Augustus doubtfully, "and see what she intends doing."

Ada was about to demur; but the dinner-bell rang, and they all trooped in together.

Mrs. Stanton made no remark on the untidy hair and dress of all the children, as they gathered round the table, wisely deferring any observation on lesser matters till she had opportunity to strike at the root.

"Should you not like a drive or a walk this afternoon, my dear?" asked Aunt Charlotte of Mrs. Stanton.

"I should like a country ramble of all things another day," she replied; "but as I am rather tired, I thought we might take books or work to the tempting seat under the horse-chestnut tree that I see from my windows."

"As you like, my dear; but it is too draughty for me. I feel rather sleepy after dinner, and a few hours' rest brightens me up for the evening."

"Let us go to the wood and gather blackberries," whispered Ada to her brother.

"Don't whisper, my dear," said the old lady reprovingly, "it is not polite."

Ada tossed her head conceitedly, and no more was said till they rose from the table. Then Aunt Charlotte accepted Mrs. Stanton's proffered aid with thanks; and leaning on her arm, slowly crossed the hall.

"How strangely different an officer's equipment used to be to what it is now?" said the latter, stopping to admire a complete suit of chain-armour and various ancient weapons, offensive and defensive, that hung upon the walls.

The children drēw near, and grouped themselves around, while aunt Charlotte explained how they had all been brought from Elford Park: a fine old place about four miles from Oxdown, where the Stanton family had lived for many genera-

tions ; how the last possessor had met with heavy losses, and at length was compelled to sell the old place. Captain Stanton, being the only son, had saved these few, amongst other relics, from the general wreck.

" Battles were *real* fights when officers wore this," observed Augustus ; " now they only mow fellows down by the hundred. I wonder what sort of horrible new machine they will have invented by the time I am grown up for sweeping whole regiments off the field. It seems to me they won't stop at anything."

" Do you think of going into the army ?" asked his stepmother, as they moved towards the drawing-room.

" Yes ;" he answered shortly.

" It is a noble profession," she said, as she carefully guided the old lady to the sofa.

" It was twice as noble long ago," said Augustus, addressing her in spite of himself. " I should like to have worn a suit just like that in the hall. Oh, shouldn't I have scattered my enemies right and left !"

" It seems so cruel to kill people," said little Alfred, shuddering. " I should like a battle where no one was hurt."

" That's impossible," said his eldest brother.

" Well, then, I shall be a doctor, and cure people instead of killing them."

" Very well," said Augustus tranquilly, " I shall wound as many as you like for you to cure them."

Ada and Katie exclaimed at his cruelty, and when quiet was restored, Mrs. Stanton took up a book, and asked if any one would like to come and sit out of doors. No one answered ; the children looked at each other ; their stepmother's face and voice was very attractive. All wished to go ; but each felt ashamed of the other. At length Mrs. Stanton, after waiting patiently for an answer, went away alone, the children following slowly as far as the hall.

" I say," shouted Augustus suddenly, as he watched her cross the sward and disappear beneath the overhanging tree, " wouldn't

it be a lark for me to dress up in this armour, and give her a thorough good fright!"

No sooner said than done. They all eagerly helped him to array himself, and about ten minutes afterwards Mrs. Stanton was alarmed by a loud shout, close outside the drooping boughs, of "War to the knife! Victory or death!"

She started violently, and the next moment Augustus rushed in, arrayed in the old corslet of chain-armour, a drawn sword in hand.

"Defend thee or die!" he said, putting himself in a tragic attitude, while the others peeped admiringly through the thick foliage, tittering audibly.

Mrs. Stanton recovered her presence of mind in a moment.

"You look very formidable," she said, smiling, though the colour had not returned to her cheek.

"Don't I?" he cried, brandishing his naked sword; "I defy the whole world!"

"He looks like the giant in my Sunday picture-book," said Alfred, pushing his way with the others through the branches, and gravely confronting his brother.

"And you, Alfie, are just like the little shepherd boy," cried Katie.

"Am I, mamma?" asked Alfred, looking earnestly up at his stepmother.

"I hope you are," she gravely replied.

"Why do you *hope* it, mamma?" asked Katie in surprise; "do you wish him to kill Gus with five smooth stones?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Stanton, smiling; "I should like to see this dear little boy, and indeed you all, going to fight as bravely as David did against his enemies."

"Girls can't fight; nor children like Tom and Alfie!" exclaimed Augustus scornfully; "even *I* can't get into the army for several years."

"You can *now* enter the army that I allude to," said Mrs. Stanton gently; "and your sisters and little brothers are not

excluded either, but would be lovingly welcomed by the great Captain."

"I am awfully hot in this plaguy thing," interrupted Augustus; "here, Alfie, carry it back into the hall for me!"

Ada helped him to take it off; Alfred looked wistfully at his stepmother.

"Please wait for me," he entreated; "don't begin to tell them while I am away."

Mrs. Stanton smiled a negative; and Augustus exclaimed rudely,

"No, of course not; run along, you little goose!"

Alfred toiled manfully away with his heavy burden; Tom, involuntarily obeying a glance from his stepmother, carried off the unsheathed sword; and speedily both came running back out of breath, and seated themselves beside Mrs. Stanton.

"I have no doubt you have all heard about this warfare before," she said.

"We were talking about war before you came," said Augustus mischievously, "and I said my watchword would be, War to the knife!"

"Against whom?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Alfred eagerly, "the sword was called Hatred, and the helmet Disobedience, and—and—ever so much more!"

"But who was the enemy?"

"Oh," said Augustus, colouring crimson, "that is a secret!"

Mrs. Stanton fixed her earnest eyes upon his face, while the soft tint deepened in her cheek. They saw she guessed something very like the truth, and all the young faces looked guilty and confused.

There followed a short pause.

"Children," she asked simply, "would you all like to be really happy?"

"We *were* happy enough," said Ada, with unkind emphasis on the verb.

Her stepmother took no notice of her remark. She looked

somewhat sad and very thoughtful for a moment or two, and then said, "Perhaps I shall explain this warfare best by telling you a story about it, which I shall call—

Armed for Action.

"Put on the whole armour of God."—EPHESIANS vi. 11.

"There was a country full of petty independent states and towns, all at variance with each other, and perpetually embroiled in the miseries of civil war; but they had one great enemy in a neighbouring kingdom, who came against them all collectively, and made war upon them. Overlooking their minor jealousies and quarrels, the lesser states joined forces against their powerful enemy, and drove him from their coasts. You have no idea how they began to honour and like each other when thus united by a common interest."

"I have read something like that in Grecian history," said Tom.

"But who do you want us to make common cause against?" asked Augustus.

"Against your and my great enemy. It is quite wonderful how much we should all begin to respect and love each other, if only our arms were always directed against the one all-important foe."

"You have not told us who he is," said Katie.

"He is called the 'prince of the power of the air.'"

"Why, that is in the Bible somewhere," cried Ada.

"Oh, then we don't want to hear any more about it!" said Augustus, turning away; while Tom, following his example, became engrossed in the capture of a butterfly.

"What do you really mean?" asked Ada.

"I mean the good fight that every true Christian must maintain against all that is sinful and wrong."

"Is that all?" exclaimed Katie, in disappointed tones.

"Oh," said Ada, yawning, and taking up the book her step-mother had laid down, "everyone knows about that!"

"I wish they did," said Mrs. Stanton, looking sadly at the sudden dispersion of her youthful auditors.

"I don't," said Alfred, looking up gravely. "Please, mamma, tell me about this battle; do the soldiers wear real steel armour like that in the hall that Gus put on?"

"No, Alfie, the soldiers of the cross wear an invisible armour, that is given them by the great Captain Himself; it is strong and invincible; none ever wrought on earth can be compared to it."

"Do you know any one who wears it?"

"Yes, several."

"But I don't."

"Yes, little Alfie, you know your own dear papa, he wears it."

Tom looked up, and forgot the butterfly, while Katie drew a little nearer.

"Did he get it when he was in London?" asked Alfred.

"No, dear child, he has worn it for many years; long before I knew him."

"Does he always take it about with him? I did not see it in his portmanteau when Grimes was packing up his things to-day."

Augustus showed he was listening, though his face was still turned away, by giving an irrepressible laugh.

"Why, you foolish boy," exclaimed Ada, looking up from the book, which she had been holding upside down, "it is invisible; that means, it can't be seen by any one."

"Then, mamma, how do you know papa wears it?"

"It is an armour of light, and gleams from its radiance are often quite perceptible to those who come in contact with the Christian soldier."

"I am sure I never saw a light shining round papa!"

"I perceived the glow and glitter of several bright pieces this morning," said Mrs. Stanton, her eyes filling with tears. "When papa wished us 'good-bye' this morning, and said that we should all meet in heaven, if it were God's will we should meet no more on earth, it seemed to me I could see a golden light gleaming from his shield of faith. And when I said that

Captain Monk had told my brother that the war would probably be over in a month, papa said it was better not to build upon it, for no one could tell just yet, there was a flash of light from the girdle of truth, which would not let me build on false hopes ; and then when he put his little Bible in his pocket, just before he went away, and said he hoped God would enable him to be a comfort to some poor dying fellow-soldier, I knew he was armed with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and that he was going forth with his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

Alfred looked up very gravely, and said, "I think I know better what you mean now, mamma ; tell me more about it."

"Willingly, dear child. That old suit of chain-armour we have just seen on Augustus was difficult to make and expensive to buy ; it has grown rusty, you see, and broken, and all its old brightness has long since departed ; but the great Prince of Peace gives the heavenly armour without money and without price to all who ask in spirit and in truth. He purchased it for them Himself by the shedding of His own life-blood. Each glittering piece is forged in heaven, and their brilliancy lasts throughout eternity."

"The Prince of Peace? mamma."

"Yes, dear, the Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God, who came down from heaven to die for our sins."

"But, mamma, will He give it to even little *me*?"

"Yes, to little Alfred Stanton, and every other little boy and girl who truly and earnestly asks Him. You know, dear children, papa has only strong men in his regiment ; but in this holy army there are young men and maidens, old men and little children, all bearing His banner, and fighting His battles."

The five young faces looked very earnestly at Mrs. Stanton, and Alfred once more entreated : "Tell me all about it, mamma, from beginning to end."

"Mankind had deserted from the Prince of Peace," began Mrs. Stanton, "and had gone to serve a wicked warrior named

the prince of the power of the air, who illtreated them, bound them with chains, and induced them to do many wrong and hurtful things. But the good Prince still loved and pitied them so much, that He left His glorious kingdom, where He reigned with His Father, the King of kings, and came down to the battle-field of this world, and fought a great fight with the evil prince, routing and defeating him completely.

“Then, in the fulness of His everlasting love, He paid the ransom of His own life-blood, and suffered a cruel, lingering death upon the cross on Calvary, to redeem them from the power and service of their hard master; that, being thus justified freely by His blood, they might follow Him across the broad battle-plain to the glorious kingdom He had prepared for them, where they would reign with Him for ever and ever.

“The wicked prince kept many of his subjects in such dark and distant parts of his territory that they never even heard the glad news of this great salvation. Others heard it from the good Prince’s servants, who went about the enemy’s camp warning his slaves to flee from the terrible doom that awaited them. Some would not hearken, but reviled and mocked His messengers; others listened respectfully, but made no effort to escape; while some, when the tidings reached their ears, greatly longed to be free, but instead of simply trusting in the perfect redemption purchased for them by the great Captain, and looking to Him in earnest faith for help and instruction, they set forth alone across the wide battle-field, and soon found that, unarmed and unprotected as they were, the journey was difficult and dangerous; and though the wicked prince dared not show himself openly since he had been crushed by his powerful foe, yet he and his emissaries (especially two generals, only second to himself in strength and cunning, called ‘The World’ and ‘The Flesh’) did all they could to impede the progress of those whose faces were set towards the good Prince’s camp, lurking in ambush behind each bush and tree, and shooting showers of poisoned darts and arrows across their path. So these mis-

guided pilgrims were soon discouraged, and gave up the conflict, deeming it hopeless to struggle against so inveterate a master.

“But others, rejoicing that a way of liberty and happiness was opened to them, and drawn by the gentle influence of His Holy Spirit, burst their heavy fetters, and came to enrol themselves under the great Captain’s banner. Kneeling humbly before Him, they expressed their sorrow and contrition for having wandered from Him like lost sheep, and submitted to the evil prince, His enemy, and besought Him to have mercy, and take them into His service again. Then, casting aside their soiled and torn garments, they were washed and cleansed by His most precious blood, and clothed in the pure robe of His spotless righteousness. The good Captain laid His hands lovingly on the head of each, and said, ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;’ and also, ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

“Then He commanded that they should be arrayed from head to foot in His armour, so that as they crossed the wild plain—through which was the narrow path that led to the gates of His beautiful city—the fiery darts of the enemy could in no way hurt or injure them.

“This armour was bright and glittering; but every victory added to its lustre; and those suits worn by the Prince’s old veterans, who had seen hard service and conquered many a foe, shone with a heavenly radiance that shed a glow of light round the steps of the wearer—a glow so brilliant that even their enemies perceived it, and though they hated, were constrained to admire it.

“It was composed of six pieces: ‘The girdle of truth;’ ‘The breast-plate of righteousness;’ ‘The shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace;’ ‘The shield of faith;’ ‘The helmet of salvation;’ and ‘The sword of the Spirit.’

“The breast-plate called *Righteousness* was a wonderful piece of armour. It had no brightness in itself; but on its smooth

surface was reflected, as in a mirror, the beams that shone from a plate of dazzling glory worn by the Prince Himself.

"Many little boys and girls, even younger than my little Alfie, set forth upon this great expedition, full of hope and joy, bearing the white standard of their Leader."

"'What a glorious thing it is to be a soldier of the cross!' said one of these little warriors exultingly.

"'Yes, indeed,' replied another, looking up at the snow-white folds that waved over his head, 'His banner over us is love.'

"'What is that crowd down yonder?' asked one suddenly.

"'The enemy's children at play.'

"'Let us stop and look on.'

"'We have no time to waste,' interposed a gentle little maiden; 'our Prince said, if we loiter at the commencement of our journey, we shall find it all the harder afterwards. Besides, we can play as we walk. Our great Captain likes to see us looking happy.'

"'Hear how they laugh!' exclaimed one little fellow, stopping short.

"The rest walked more slowly, and immediately all the distant children came trooping towards them, crying, 'Stop! Wait! We want you to play with us.'

"They stood still for a moment, and the noisy crowd pressed round them eagerly.

"'Come,' said one of the biggest of them, named Bad-Habits, 'have a game with us now. There is plenty of time for your journey when you grow up. Children needn't think of such things.'

"'We may not live to be grown up,' answered one soldier, beckoning the others to come on. 'Many children die, and are lost in your prince's service. Besides, our Captain so loves little children, and we love Him too well to grieve Him by straying from Him again.'

"'Don't go,' entreated another of the enemy's little servants; 'you can't imagine what fun we have. We tell little lies that

are never found out ; we take little things that are never missed ; we gamble for halfpence, and——’

“ ‘Gamble!’ echoed a young soldier of the cross, glancing doubtfully over the plain. ‘I wonder do they win much money?’

“ ‘Yes,’ they all cried in chorus, ‘we gain lots of money, and spend it in all sorts of pleasures.’

“ ‘But your chains!’ objected one, perceiving some links of steel, half hidden by their gay attire. ‘I should not like to be tied and bound as you all are.’

“ ‘They are loose enough, and not very heavy. We can cast them off any day.’

“ ‘Loose *now*, perhaps,’ said a little soldier, stooping to fasten his sandals ; ‘but I have heard that, as you grow older and bigger, they become tight and painful, and in the end it is almost impossible to force them off.’

“ ‘Pooh,’ they replied contemptuously, ‘we are not going to grow old in a day ; let us enjoy our youth while we have it ; our prince gives us plenty of play, and not only that, but pays us wages for doing nothing whatever but amuse ourselves.’

“The youthful warrior looked wistfully at his bright sword : that one glance at its keen two-edged blade emboldened him to say firmly and decidedly,

“ ‘I know your prince’s wages, children ; it is death, eternal death ; that is the reward of sin. Come with us, and seek the Captain of our Salvation ; His precious gift is eternal life to all who love and obey Him.’

“Some of the children looked very grave, and much struck by what he said ; the others only laughed and mocked, and uttered many dreadful things, cursing and swearing, and taking the name of the King of kings in vain. The little band of soldiers, shocked and surprised, seized their shields, which had slipped from their grasp when they stopped, and fastened them firmer than before in their places on the left arm, where they were worn to protect the heart, and ran on their way faster than ever.

"Their little hearts beat fast as they saw a great black giant, named Falsehood, coming straight towards them. He scowled on them as they approached, and asked them to whom did they belong?

"The foremost hesitated; he felt a timid soldier at his side tremble for fear, and was almost inclined to answer, 'To your party.' His nervous fingers were unconsciously unclasping the bright buckle of his girdle, when to his terror the watchful foe raised his deadly weapon to his shoulder, and pointed it straight at the narrow aperture. One inch wider, and he would have discharged the fatal shot; but the little frightened one beside him took courage, brandished her sword, and pointed out their great Captain crossing the plain before them; and in the dreadful moment that ensued, they could hear His voice come distantly on the wind, faint but clear, 'Lie not one to another.' And with one great effort the soldier closed the strong clasp, turned stedfastly and resolutely away, and all once more fled along the narrow path towards their great Commander.

"As they ran they were much troubled by the giant's little friends and followers, called White Lies, Small Prevarications, Insinuated Slander, and Little Deceits, who beset them on all sides, and, on account of their diminutive size and untiring pertinacity, were even harder to resist than the great giant himself; indeed, but for their nearness to the Captain and His ever-ready help, they would have found it impossible to ward off the sharp little arrows that clashed one after another against the broad belt of Truth.

"But time would fail me to tell, my dear little Alfie, of all the foes these children had to meet and conquer before they reached the heavenly kingdom their Prince had prepared for them. I must only add, they arrived at last, and exchanged their glistening armour for the white robe of everlasting glory."

"But, mamma," exclaimed all the children together, "the story does not seem half told."

"No, indeed, children; it is only a fragment of a most won-

derful story. The more I say about this warfare, the more weak and incapable my words seem to describe it. I trust the little I have told makes you all long to join the great warfare, and fight the good Prince's battles."

"Mamma," said Alfred thoughtfully, "I think I should understand better if you told us another time about some more little children who wore this armour."

"Very well ; if you all like, I shall tell you more stories about it ; and as our little warriors are now '*armed for action*,' we shall go on to the letter B next time."

"And then C," exclaimed Tom eagerly, "and D, and so on through the whole alphabet down to Z."

"We have no English word beginning with X ; but all the other letters I think I can find stories for. Perhaps by the time they are all finished we shall be expecting papa home again."

"Do tell us another now, mamma."

"No, Alfie, dear ; I have left your aunt all alone, and must now go and read to her."

"She is accustomed to be left alone," said Ada. "We are scarcely ever with her except in the evenings. It is so hot still, we can't play. Do please tell us another."

"Not now," repeated Mrs. Stanton, with a gentle decision that silenced all further entreaties ; and, taking up her book, she left them.

"That is cool," cried Ada, flushing with indignation.

"I did not think she could be so determined," said Augustus, "she looks so meek and mild."

"One never knows what these wonderfully sweet kind of people are capable of," said Ada.

"She is capable of withstanding our entreaties that she may do a kindness for another, when she would far rather have stayed here to gratify us," observed Tom.

"Have you deserted our cause already ?" asked Augustus.

"Yes," said Tom decidedly. "I throw down the sword of

Hatred, the helmet of *Disobedience*, with its plume of *Impertinence*, the shield of *Defiance*, the rifle of *Rudeness*, the gauntlet of *Malice*, the corslet of *Suspicion*, and refuse to bear arms against her."

"And I arm myself from head to foot in those very pieces of armour," said Augustus, "and defy her right to control us."

"That is right," said Ada approvingly. "I am sure a deserter like Tom, who sneaks out of his regiment at the first approach of the foe, won't be much use as a soldier in whatever other cause he may enlist."

"I did not say I was going to enlist anywhere else," said Tom.

"It follows as a matter of course," returned Augustus; "in a civil war like this you cannot be neutral; so decide at once for one or the other. Which shall it be?"

"Not your side certainly."

"The one she spoke of?"

"Ye—s; n—o," said Tom hesitatingly.

"The armour mamma spoke of seems such a solemn, *real* kind of thing," said Katie gravely.

"It simply means to become awfully pious," said Augustus; "to wear a long face, and say that every thing any one else does is wrong."

"It is not that," returned Tom promptly; "for she said papa wears it, and he hasn't a long face; and she wears it herself, and I am sure she never said anything we do is wrong."

"Well, desert if you like," said Ada carelessly. "I should like to see you trying to fight in the other army."

"What would you do with the little hoard of money you have in the drawer upstairs," sneered Augustus; "give it away to the poor?"

Tom's eyes flashed. "I have no hoard——"

"There goes little Deceit," laughed Augustus. "Why your enemies are attacking you before you have even time to put on your armour."

"*Deceit?*" echoed Tom angrily.

"Yes, deceit; for I heard your two half-crowns clinking into your store this morning; besides, your pocket-money must be somewhere, for you never spend it."

Tom was on his feet with one bound, and struck his brother in the face.

"Oh, that's your kind of warfare is it?" asked Augustus, returning the blow with interest; and a fight would have ensued between the brothers had not Ada, partly by force, partly by persuasion, induced them to desist.

"I advise you to turn your arms next time against your temper," said Augustus, giving his brother a parting box on the ear; "you'll find it pays better than turning them against me."

Tom gave him a glance of sullen defiance; and Ada, seeing a prospect of a renewal of the fray, proposed they should waste no more of the half-holiday, but go at once off to the fields to find blackberries.





CHAPTER III.

ENSLAVED BY THE FOE.

Broken Bonds.

NEXT morning Mrs. Stanton was coming down to breakfast, when she heard the sound of loud, angry tones outside the open hall door. She stopped a moment, and recognized Augustus' voice. Drawing nearer, she distinguished words of violent abuse, largely intermingled with oaths. She hesitated no longer, and advanced quickly.

On the steps outside stood Augustus, looking pale with fury; while on the gravel walk below there was a little ragged boy, gazing up at him with an expression of mingled obstinacy and terror. Just as Mrs. Stanton appeared on the threshold Augustus ceased speaking, sprang upon the boy, and violently dragging off his fustian jacket, turned all the pockets inside out.

"Ah!" he cried, holding up a piece of torn white linen with something heavy tied in one corner of it. "Don't attempt to come near this place again, you young rogue!" And hurriedly untying the knot, he discovered half a crown, coolly pocketed the coin, and throwing the old coat at the boy's head with another oath, he turned on his heel, and for the first time perceived that his stepmother was witness of the transaction.

"He is a young thief," he said, in an explanatory tone, looking half-ashamed of himself, as he met the shocked, pained expression of her face.

"It appears that Grimes brought down my coat to brush it, and while his back was turned this little beggar, who was eating something the servants gave him, abstracted one of the half-crowns from my pocket that papa gave me yesterday."

"You are sure there can be no mistake?"

"Perfectly certain; I found it in his pocket, and shall let him off this time; but if he ever turns up again," he added, glancing threateningly back at the offender, "I shall send for the police. Where are the others? I must tell them about it."

"Not come down yet, I think;" then, as he bounded upstairs, she turned to the poor little culprit, who stood as if turned into stone, exactly in the same attitude, with his jacket lying where it fell at his feet.

"What is your name?" she asked gently.

He took no notice, and she repeated the question. Still no reply. His eyes were fixed on the old piece of linen that lay on the steps before him. She touched his shoulder.

"Won't you answer me?" she asked.

He looked up, met the grave enquiring eyes, and a ray of intelligence lit up his features as he touched his lips and ear, and shook his head.

"Poor child—deaf and dumb!" she said, taking up the old jacket, and holding it open for him to put it on, with the usual sweet winning look in her soft brown eyes.

He mechanically thrust in his arms; then picking up the linen rag, gazing at it for a moment with the most woebegone expression, and slowly walked away.

Mrs. Stanton stood watching him for a few minutes, and then went into the dining-room. The children were all seated at the table, talking loudly and indignantly.

"Was it not well I missed it before he was gone?" shouted Augustus, raising his voice above the rest.

"Do you know where he lives?" asked his stepmother, her low clear tones checking the boisterous voices as no reproof would have done.

"Oh, I don't care to know ; for I shan't trouble myself about getting him punished as he deserves," said Augustus.

"I should like to be quite sure that the money was really yours."

"Of course it is mine."

"How can you tell?"

"He did not even attempt to deny it, the sullen little beggar. I could not get him to utter a word."

"He could not. He is deaf and dumb."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" cried Augustus rudely. "He just pretended that to excite your compassion, and I see he has gained his point."

"One cannot but pity him," she answered gravely, "whether he be guilty or not."

"And you choose to think him innocent, when I tell you he took my money? The boy's look and tone was angry and insolent."

Mrs. Stanton made no reply.

"It seems to me very unfair," said Ada, taking her brother's part, "that you should have less faith in what Gus says than you have in a horrid little ragged boy like that."

"There goes a sharp cut with the sword Hatred," said Tom in an under tone.

"Yes," whispered Augustus, "and I am buckling on the shield Defiance." Then he added aloud: "I don't care what you think of me, or of him either. Come, children, all of you ; it is school-time."

They all rushed off, and left her alone ; but a moment afterwards the door reopened, and little Alfred came in. Slowly advancing towards her, he said softly :

"Mamma, I am sorry."

She instantly stooped to kiss him.

"Sorry for what, Alfie?"

"Sorry about this wicked armour ; and—and—I wish—Oh, I wish I knew how to go into the other army, mamma ! Will you teach me to try?"

"Ask the great Captain, the Lord Jesus, to take you in. He loves all little children, Alfie. He loves you, and wishes you to come, even more than you feel to want Him."

Alfred looked wistfully at the sky.

"He does not seem near me, mamma."

"He is with us both now at this moment, influencing you to wish to come to Him."

"Mamma," whispered Alfred, "will you tell Him I am ready to come now?"

Mrs. Stanton instantly complied ; and kneeling with the little boy by the breakfast-table, prayed for him in low soft tones that only Alfie and One other could hear.

"Mamma," he said, as they rose from their knees, "when next I have time to pray, I will say to Jesus—

"'Just as I am, without one plea.'

Don't you know that pretty hymn?"

"Yes, Alfie ; but don't wait till you have leisure to kneel and pray. Say your little hymn in your heart throughout the day, and you will find your great Captain is very near you always."

"I will try to remember," said the child earnestly ; and answering an imperious call from the lawn, he jumped out of the low, open window, and joined the others on the avenue.

Mrs. Stanton sat motionless, absorbed in grave musings for a little while ; then she rose to go about her household concerns ; and when her morning duties were accomplished, still feeling weary and depressed by the great responsibility of her position, she retired to her room to gird herself anew in the invincible armour, to draw near to her great Captain, and revive hope, strength, and patience from communion with Him ; and it was the usual serene, cheerful face that met the children in the dining-room some hours afterwards, and greeted old Miss Stanton when she made her appearance at the table.

The children were quieter than usual, and all, except Alfred, studiously avoided addressing her, or even glancing towards her.

Conscience was speaking reprovably in each young heart, and it was a relief to them all when they left her presence, and set off to school again. Mrs. and Miss Stanton drove out in the pony carriage, and afterwards the former read the old lady to sleep on the drawing-room sofa, and then took her book to the rustic seat under the horse-chestnut; and there the children found her when they returned.

"Augustus," she said, as the boy drew back on discovering her there, "I have been wishing to speak to you."

"What about?" asked Augustus, speaking the more ungraciously because the others all drew near to listen.

"About that half-crown. Would it not be better not to spend it till we find out more about it?"

"There is nothing whatever to find out."

"Yes; for it may belong to the poor little boy; and by waiting a few days, yours may be found; or, at least, we might call on the boy's family, and make enquiries about him."

"There is nothing to enquire about. Grimes says he probably belongs to a gang of thieves. He thinks he comes from Pope's Hollow, a dreadful mining place, about three miles off, where there has been a strike, and everybody is starving."

"Then there is even a greater reason that we should look after them."

"If they are starving," observed Tom, "it is very unlikely that boy should have half-a-crown of his own."

"Yes, indeed," said Augustus; then added indignantly, "But mamma had far rather think I had accused him falsely, than believe he had been guilty."

"Would you, mamma?" asked Katie.

"Yes, she would," said Augustus quickly. "You only care for him," he added, addressing her with a sudden flush on his cheek; "you don't seem in the least sorry for the loss that half papa's parting gift would have been to me."

"I have been very sorry for you," she said, looking at him earnestly; "more grieved and pained than you can imagine."

"I call that too much sorrow," said Ada, laughing. But Augustus seemed impressed by her words and look.

"I cannot but feel the keenest regret and sorrow," she continued, her beautiful eyes filling with tears, "when I remember the first words that fell on my ear when I came down this morning." The children glanced enquiringly at each other, but she kept her eyes fixed on Augustus' face. He looked puzzled for an instant, then blushed for shame.

"Did you hear me scolding that little beggar?"

"Yes."

"I believe I spoke pretty strongly," he said, trying to laugh off the uncomfortable sensation of shame and self-reproach. "It is a habit I have got into."

"*Bad-Habits* was one of the Prince's enemies," said Alfred, looking up suddenly.

"Yes, indeed," said his stepmother gravely; "he is a terrible master."

"All the fellows at our school swear more or less," said Augustus, half apologetically, "and one catches it up so easily."

"Yes, unless one is armed, and watchful."

"I suppose one could avoid it at the outset; but when one gets into the habit of it, it is hard to leave it off."

"It is almost impossible to do so without help."

"Why, Tom swears a little; and even Alfie does sometimes."

"Oh, mamma," cried Alfred colouring, "I never thought about it being wrong!"

"Would you make use of those expressions before papa, Alfie, or in your tutor's hearing?"

"No, mamma."

"Then why are you not all afraid to speak thus before God, who commands us not to swear, or take His holy name in vain?"

The children were silent.

"I have got so much into the habit of it," said Tom at length; "I doubt if I could leave it off, even if I tried."

"I don't want to try," said Augustus carelessly. "What a life I should lead, watching every word I uttered!"

"And do you prefer being a slave to the enemy Bad-Habits?"

"I am not a slave," said Augustus, looking offended.

"If you do not choose to be enslaved by him, why not bravely cast him off, and slay him?"

"I am sure I don't want to fight against myself," he answered.

"It would be awfully hard work. Besides, there are plenty of other people to fight against, if one is pugilistically inclined."

"As to being a slave," said Tom, "I *know* I am perfectly free; for I can leave it off at any time I choose."

"You said just now you could not," observed Katie.

"Children," said Mrs. Stanton, who had been looking very thoughtful for the last few minutes, "I shall tell you my second story now, if you like."

They all gladly gathered round her, and she began:

Broken Bonds.

"Thou hast loosed my bonds."--PSALM cxvi. 16.

"It was Sunday morning, and the church bells were ringing in one of the largest and busiest of our manufacturing towns. In the principal thoroughfares the shops and warehouses were almost all closed; week-day traffic had ceased its noisy roll; and groups of orderly, well-dressed people threaded their quiet way to their various places of worship. But in the lanes and alleys branching from these broader streets very little difference was observable. The same ill-cared-for children played in the gutters; the same untidy women and ragged men passed to and fro, perhaps rather more listlessly and lazily on this day of rest; but that was all. Troops of poorly but neatly-clothed children were emerging from the different school-houses, and forming in procession to march two-and-two to church; boys first, with smooth hair and clean bright faces; then long rows of little girls, in their best frocks and Sunday hats, many with gaycoloured ribbons, and a few (I am sorry to say) with artificial flowers.

“From amongst these latter one little maiden slipped away unperceived, and turned down a by-street. There were no false flowers or attempts at tawdry finery in her plain cotton dress and shady hat, with its simple band and bow of brown ribbon. The pale, placid, little face was half hidden beneath it; and perhaps it was the reflection of this young soldier's invisible helmet that made those quiet eyes glisten with such sweet serenity, only disturbed by a wistful glance every now and then up and down the narrow street, as if looking for someone. It was for David she was watching, her only brother, who had promised last Sunday to go to church with her to-day. This was a great event *now*, though until quite lately his attendance in the old church had been almost as regular as hers. But for the last few weeks he had taken up with some new friends, whose influence and example were leading him to evil, and week-day or Sunday she saw but little of him. To-day she felt particularly glad of the hardly-extorted promise he had made her.

“Her lesson in Sunday-school had been about the children of Israel in Egypt. She had been told how the wicked king made their lives bitter to them, how they were forced to serve with rigour, and sorrowful and well-nigh despairing they sighed by reason of the bondage. Then her teacher proceeded to explain how true a type this was of man's spiritual state before the grace of God had loosed the bars of iron and snapped the chains asunder; how fast bound was the natural heart of man in misery and sin, enslaved by the god of this world; making bricks without straw; seeking peace and satisfaction without the materials for true happiness; working themselves to death, eternal death, in his cruel service.

“This little pupil had listened with deep attention till she trembled for the brother she so dearly loved; and it was with new joy and hope she then listened to the history of the leader who was raised up for them—type of the great Redeemer of the world—and of the glorious deliverance he wrought for them.

"Her mind was full of these subjects as she looked anxiously round from time to time, fearing every moment the church bells would stop, and she should be obliged to go in without him.

"But David was close at hand, sauntering up a neighbouring lane, loitering slowly, till all the schools should have broken up, and there was no chance of his little sister Bessie coming to claim the fulfilment of his oft-repeated, oft-broken promise.

"He held his head erect, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, pushed his hat very much on one side, and assumed the conceited, swaggering air of being dressed in his best, and very conscious of it. As he strutted along, with a face of solemn importance, he and his little sister arrived at the same corner simultaneously, and ran so sharply against each other as nearly to knock the little girl down.

"'Why don't you look where you're going?' growled David, straightening his hat, and arranging his gay necktie; 'the road is wide en—— Holloa, Bessie, I didn't see 'twas you!'

"Bessie laughed as she stooped to pick up her prayer and hymn books that had dropped in the collision, and dusted them carefully with a little red-bordered pocket-handkerchief.

"'You're ready in good time, Davy,' she said joyously. 'I was afraid I had missed you.'

"'I wish you had.'

"'Oh, Davy! aint you coming?'

"'Not I.'

"'Where are you going?' asked Bessie, looking grieved and crestfallen.

"'Out into the country with some friends of mine. There's James Weir, Dan Loader, and Nat Little and me is going to have a jollification down on the river.'

"Bessie's lips quivered; her eyes filled with tears as she half turned away her head, and said timidly:

"'I thought you promised as you'd come to church this Sabbath with me?'

“‘Aye, and so I will by’n-by. Never you fear, Bess, I’ll turn as good as gold some day soon, and s’prise you.’

“‘If you goes a putting of it off from Sunday to Sunday like that, Davy, p’raps as you’ll never——”

“‘Here now, shut up. I haven’t time to stop for an open-air sermon. I’d a’most sooner go to church, and ha’ done with it. There’s the bell stopping. Run off, and put up a prayer for your wicked brother.’ Then perceiving the flush of pain at his mocking words tinging the little girl’s pale cheek, he added more kindly : ‘Do, Bess; I mean it. I likes to feel you’s praying for me; and may be next Sunday, if I can keep away from those fellows, we’ll both go off there together.’

“‘‘Twon’t be easier to keep from ’em next Sabbath nor it is to-day,’ said Bessie, looking up pleadingly into his face. ‘Oh, Davy, can’t you see that every time you goes it’s harder for you to break loose from ’em?’

“‘Nonsense, child, I can’t stay arguing all day. I’m not a little girl like you, Bess, to be said and led by every one. I’m fifteen now, and my own master into the bargain.’

“‘*Slave*, you mean,’ muttered Bessie, in a low tone.

“‘Slave!’ echoed David, laughing gaily. ‘Why, Bess, I’m a free-born Englishman. Rule Britannia! Britons never, never shall be slaves.’

“‘You *are* one, anyhow,’ said Bessie, raising her eyes fearlessly to her brother’s face.

“‘I aint. Whose? I should like to know.’

“‘The young soldier of the cross paused, and hesitated. It seemed such a pity to put David out of temper, now that he had been bearing so good-humouredly with her pertinacity; but matters had been growing worse and worse lately. Every week he had been led further astray, and the thought of her lesson in Sunday-school roused her to make another effort.

“‘‘The slave of sin,’ she murmured softly, her eyes falling on her books again.

But David was not cross; he only laughed more loudly.

“‘Well, it’s not a bad master,’ he said, ‘and I can break away from him any time; and I mean to, though you won’t believe it.’

“‘When? Oh, when, Davy? Haven’t you been saying that ever since you took up with these bad ways? And, oh, I feel that every time you gives in to him, you puts another rivet in the chain that binds you down, and makes it firmer and stronger than the last.’

“‘Where did you learn all that fine talk?’ said David, looking at his sister’s downcast eyes and crimson cheeks.

“The little warrior paused to appeal silently in her heart to her great Captain for help and encouragement; then looked up with new courage :

“‘At Sunday-school. Teacher’s been telling us that sin is a strong master; and such a hard one, Davy! You know it well, and you gives him a load of trouble sometimes; for there’s a voice that speaks so earnest within you, that now and then you struggles and strives to get free, and dashes the heavy chains nigh to pieces. But then he speaks fair and soft, and you gives in, and knocks under to him, and puts the hands and feet that were nearly free quite quiet into the irons again.’

“‘How do you know all this?’ muttered David, half angry, half convinced. ‘They wasn’t preaching to you about *me*.’

“‘No; about nobody partikler. But aint it true?’ asked the little sister with a wistful smile. ‘You can’t deny it, can you? Be brave, David. Won’t ’ee break away from him for ever, and come along of me to the church yonder? and you’ll kneel side by side with me in the big pew in the corner, and give yourself up to the good Captain, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be His free man, a new creature, a soldier in His army.’

“There was a great struggle going on in David’s mind. It was only about a month ago he had met the bad companions that were leading him to take pleasure in evil courses; and many and deep had been his qualms of conscience since; one day, in a fit of bitter remorse, almost determining to burst the bonds that held him so fast, the next, caressing and fondling

the very fetters that were slowly but surely dragging him down to destruction!

"This time he had recourse to the most dangerous, because the most self-deceptive of all bondage, procrastination.

"'Bother!' he exclaimed testily, 'what made you meet me, Bess? Look 'ee, I promise you 'twill never be so again after this Sunday. But I can't help it now, for the fellows are expecting me, and they'd think it mean and shabby of me to shirk it, and give them the slip. But I shan't mind a word they ses after to-day, so keep up heart, little one; good-bye.'

"And without giving time for another word from his sister he broke away, and ran down the street.

"Bessie looked after him despairingly for a moment, took a step in the same direction; but pursuit would be worse than useless. She turned slowly and sadly away, and a few minutes afterwards crept quietly into the big pew in the corner all alone, to cast the burden of her grief and anxiety at the feet of her loving Master, and be sustained, strengthened, and comforted by His heavenly consolations.

"It was evening on that same bright summer Sabbath, and again Bessie sat in the high-backed seat, in the farthest corner of the old church. The service concluded with the sweet hymn, beginning—

"'Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me.'

One verse struck her especially, the last one of all—

"'In a service which Thy love appoints
There are no bonds for me;
For my secret heart is taught the "truth,"
That makes Thy children "free;"
And a life of self-renouncing love
Is a life of liberty;'

And it was with the words and tune still ringing in her ears that she took her way homeward.

A stranger stood upon the threshold of the quiet old house she called *home*, and as she quickly approached her anxious ears caught the words,

“ ‘Nothing more can be done, Mrs. Newton; don’t lose heart; I hope he may rally yet.’ ”

“The parish doctor walked away as he spoke, and with a throbbing heart Bessie stole softly along the dark narrow passage to the little dwelling-room at the back. Her worst fears were realized; there lay her brother David, pale and motionless, on the settle by the fire, his head bound in white bandages.

“Their poor infirm grandmother was trying with the help of her crutches to limp from her chair to his side.

“Silently and noiselessly Bessie entered, gave her an arm to lean upon, and knelt in speechless misery by the half-drowned boy.

“ ‘My poor Davy,’ moaned the old woman, laying her grey head beside his on the pillow. ‘Oh, Bessie, pray the Lord not to take him away in his thoughtlessness, but to spare him to us a while longer. I little thought to ha’ seen him laid in the grave before me; pray, dearie, *pray*.’ ”

“The request was not needed. Poor little Bessie was pouring out her whole heart, in earnest supplication to her great Captain to have mercy on His erring child, and give him space for repentance.

“For some moments not a sound broke the stillness; then Bessie raised her head, and asked how it had happened.

“ ‘They was on the water,’ whispered the old woman tremulously, ‘a steamer ran ’em down, and they was all drowned but himself.’ ”

“Bessie shuddered, and hid her face in her hands. She was roused by a slight movement on the part of the invalid—a half sigh, half sob, and as she looked hastily up, David slowly opened his eyes.

“ ‘My head,’ he said feebly. ‘Look to it, Bess, will you? the chains *do* press so heavily.’ ”

"With trembling fingers she smoothed the folds of linen, and loosened them a little over the forehead.

"David's restless eyes wandered round the room :

" 'Where's the sunlight? 'Twas dancing on the river a minute ago. 'Twas hardly fair to tie me up like that, Bess. They weighed me down like lead, you know ; so I hadn't a chance when the tug came up. There she is, Weir ; plash, plash. How the waves run along the shore ! Pull hard ; we're all but under her prow ! ' He threw out his arms, grasped the empty air, and with a groan let them fall helplessly by his side.

" 'What's he talking about ? ' asked the poor old grandmother, pressing her thin wrinkled hand on his burning brow.

" 'The irons, old gran—the iron entered into his soul ! Where did I hear that ? Oh, aye, in the old pew yonder ! Well, I'll go next Sunday, Bess ! I can't disappoint the fellows to-day, you know ! '

"The words, so often repeated in rude health and high spirits, now died away into indistinct mutterings ; the bright eyes closed, and the flickering intelligence relapsed into total insensibility again.

"So it continued throughout that dreary evening. Bessie with difficulty persuaded the feeble old woman to lie down on the bed, and in the deep silent gloom of midnight she took her solitary watch by the unconscious boy.

"What a long, long night it seemed ! How solemn the stillness around ! It was a relief to the lonely little watcher when Monday morning dawned, cold and grey. She rose from her seat at the first pale gleam, and walked to the window.

"For the last hour her grandmother had found rest in peaceful slumber ; but David still remained pale, rigid, and motionless.

"Bessie stood watching the white line of dawn break the dark clouds in the eastern sky, thinking all the while of the minister's text the evening before : ' Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings ; '

and mingled with the happy thoughts were fervent prayers for her brother. She thought she heard her name murmured softly, and in an instant was at his side.

“David’s eyes were open, and their quiet look of recognition on perceiving her left no doubt his senses had entirely returned.

“‘Up already, Bess?’ The low tones, faintly uttered though they were, awoke his grandmother. She gazed one moment at the brother and sister, then clasped her hands in silent thanksgiving. Bessie was offering hers with no less earnestness in the short pause that ensued. David looked from one to the other; then asked wanderingly, ‘What’s up with my head?’

“‘You’ve been hurt on the water.’

“‘Oh, aye, I know! Something hit me on the head as we went over. Where’s Dan Loader? He was a good swimmer.’

“‘He’s drowned.’

“‘And Weir?’

“‘Dead,’ said Bessie, with quivering lips.

“‘And Nat too?’

“‘Aye; all but you.’

“David shivered from head to foot, and closed his eyes. There was a long silence.

“The sun was by this time shining brightly. Bessie quietly began to make preparation for breakfast. David seemed revived by a little food; and when the doctor came, an hour or two later, he pronounced him to be going on so favourably that another visit that day would not be necessary, unless there was a relapse, when Bessie should fetch him at once.

“He was very silent all that day; patient in his weakness, and grateful for everything done to alleviate the pain of his head.

“But in the evening, when his grandmother fell asleep in her arm-chair on the opposite side of the fire, he drew his little sister towards him, and looked wistfully and sadly into her face.

“‘Why was I left?’ he asked gravely, taking her little fingers into both his hot hands. ‘Do’ee know why, Bess? I

could tell you. 'Twas your prayers for me in the big pew yonder. I was picturing you there all the time; and your great Captain, He took the helm in His own hands, and saved me. How could He, Bess, when I was going dead against Him?

"'Because He loved you, Davy; and He is slow to anger, and very plenteous in mercy. He deals not with us after our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities: for as the heaven is higher than the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him.'

"'Aye, to them that fear Him,' said David thoughtfully. 'But I was going dead against Him.'

"'But even when we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly; and oh, Davy, there's joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth.'

"'That's what I'm thinking of all day,' said David, clasping Bessie's fingers tightly in his. 'You were right, little one; I knew it all the time. I've been a slave of His enemy, and I was getting so fast in his fetters, I should never have broken away; but He Himself has dashed 'em in pieces with one great stroke, and with His help I shall never be in bondage again. Oh, if I could think those poor fellows had a little time! My heart aches for 'em; they didn't know, hadn't heard. Bess, 'twas wilfulness in me, not ignorance; pray to Him with me to wash my sins away in His most precious blood, and to give me grace to enlist in His service again.'

"With bowed heads and thankful hearts the brother and sister prayed together. Then David looked up, a glad smile lighting his pale face. 'Bess,' he said, 'I've just thought of that verse in the Psalms—"O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds;"' and with the calm, happy expression still on his face, he fell asleep. He awoke some hours after, strengthened and refreshed.

"Day by day as he recovered from the effects of the accident he yielded his renewed powers to the Saviour who had brought

him from the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of the people of God.

“But you must not think his old master let him go without a hard struggle. Many and many a time he waylaid David on his heavenward road, and strove to cast a chain about him, and draw him, if possible, again into his service. But a stronger than this strong man was with him throughout his pilgrimage. And when, an old man, standing on the brink of the river of death, he laid his armour down, it was in full assurance of faith that he was making a glorious exchange for the robe of glory, arrayed in which he would praise and adore his divine Master for ever!”





CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD HOME.

Contented Cattie.

THE following day was oppressively hot. Mrs. Stanton spent the afternoon, as usual, reading to the old lady ; but when the scorching sunbeams lay slantingly upon the lawn, Aunt Charlotte fell fast asleep in her chair, and the young stepmother, laying aside her book, stepped out by the open window, and went to meet the children, who were strolling leisurely up the avenue.

"How I hate this weather !" exclaimed Ada, as she drew near ; "one does not feel able to do anything."

"Not even to take a little walk ?" asked Mrs. Stanton, smiling.

"Oh, yes," cried Tom eagerly ; "will you come with us, mamma ?"

Mrs. Stanton looked round on them all, and seeing that all their faces brightened, though Alfred alone seconded the request, she assented, and soon the little group was wandering through the fields, the younger ones peering into the hedges in search of blackberries, with stained fingers and purple teeth and lips, while Ada walked beside her stepmother, partly because that, notwithstanding all her efforts to nurture dislike and enmity, she could not help secretly admiring her, and partly because she found it too hot to do anything but walk along quietly.

"Is not that a lovely place yonder on the hill ?" she asked,

pointing to a large rambling red-brick building situated among a group of trees in the centre of an extensive undulating park, "that is where papa lived when he was a little boy."

"Is it?" asked Mrs. Stanton, gazing at it with interest.

"Yes; it is called Elford Park. All the fine old armour in the hall at home was brought from there."

"I remember your aunt telling me about it."

"Yes, the night you and papa came home. Is it not a pity that this beautiful place had to be sold? papa is so fond of it."

"He must have felt greatly having to leave such a dear old home."

"I dare say; but he never speaks of it much, he always seems quite content with Stanton Villa; but we all hate it, when we feel this fine old park is ours by right, don't we Gus?"

"Yes," said Augustus, glancing back towards his home with a gesture of disgust, "it is such a stupid little spot, and the railway running right in front of the windows, makes it appear even smaller than it is."

"The fields beyond the railway belong to us," explained Ada. "The place would look better if the train did not cut it in two."

"It *would* never look like Elford Park," said Augustus discontentedly.

"When any of the people who knew papa long ago come to see us, I feel quite ashamed of it," said Ada.

"To think that this grand old place would have one day been mine," sighed Augustus. "I don't know how papa bears it so quietly and contentedly as he does."

"Your papa being a soldier ——" began Mrs. Stanton.

"That would not prevent him from being a man of property," interrupted Augustus.

"Do you think, children, that if the General the Commander-in-Chief thoroughly knew the country that papa is going to, and said to some of his officers, Leave your baggage at

such a place, and proceed on your march with only what is absolutely necessary ; there is a place a few miles distant where you will find everything you can possibly require ; would those officers be likely to murmur and dispute his authority, and look longing and regretfully at what they were obliged to leave behind ?”

“Of course not,” said Augustus ; “any one would obey cheerfully ; besides, it would be only for a little time.”

“And when the command came from the Captain of our salvation to papa, desiring him to leave Elford Park, and go to live with shortened income at Stanton Villa, do you think dear papa thought of questioning the wisdom of his Master’s decision, or repining at His orders, especially when he knew that it was only for a comparatively little time, and that there was a place not far away where every desire and wish of his heart would be gratified ?”

“What place is that ?” asked Ada.

“I mean *heaven*, the holy inheritance that is laid up for the children of God, where we shall see our Prince face to face, and be perfectly, gloriously satisfied. Come, let us sit on this mossy bank, and I will tell you about an old soldier of the cross—one who had nothing, and yet possessed all things.”

The two children gladly assented, and the younger ones were recalled.

“My next letter is C,” said Mrs. Stanton, as the expectant young faces looked eagerly up at her ; “so I shall call my little story—

Contented Cattie.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”—1 TIM. vi. 6.

“Old Cattie lived in a copse on a hillside, far away from any other human habitation. But remote and solitary though her little dwelling was, she never felt lonely. She was very poor, having nothing to support her but the little savings of her earnings in better days, and the slender product of her daily

industry in spinning or knitting; yet she always seemed to have sufficient for her frugal wants. She was old, and so feeble she could scarcely cross the uneven brick floor from her bed in the far corner to the door opposite, and yet she always looked happy and cheerful.

“Why was this? The secret of old Cattie’s contentment is easily explained. She accepted thankfully her lot in life, knowing that it was appointed by the unbounded, unmerited love of her heavenly Father.

“One day her rickety door was flung open in a way that tried its poor old hinges to the uttermost, and little Master Edward, the heir of Heatherton Park, rushed in, and sunk panting on a three-legged stool by the wide fireplace.

“‘I say, she won’t find me here, will she?’

“‘Who won’t, my deary?’ asked the old woman, standing up respectfully.

“‘Miss Hart; she is hunting for me everywhere. Sit down, please; for I must hide here for a few minutes. She never comes in here, does she?’

“‘No, sir, I never seen your new governess,’ replied the old woman, courtesying before she resumed her seat.

“‘Ah, that’s right,’ returned this independent young gentleman; ‘she set me two columns of spelling instead of one; but I was not going to learn double, and I said so; but she persisted, so I ran away.’

“‘Ye’d better go back then, sir, hadn’t ye?’ said the old woman, smiling at the bright young face and mischievous blue eyes that looked up so laughingly in her face.

“‘By-and-by, when she has given me up,’ said the boy, stretching out his feet to enjoy the warm glow from the bundle of sticks that crackled and blazed beside him.

“‘I say,’ he added, after a criticizing glance round the little room, ‘this isn’t a very jolly place to live in, is it?’

“‘’Tis a dear old place, sir; there ain’t a spot on earth I love so well.’



"You don't look as if you had ever been a little girl, said the young heir, gazing at the wrinkled face now lit by a smile of amusement."

"CONTENTED CATTIE."

Page 49.

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“‘How funny! I shouldn’t like it at all. The floor is full of lumps and bumps, and you have such a shaky little table, and hardly any chairs; and such a scrap of a window, that geranium only just fits on the sill. I wonder why it is you like it so much.’

“‘My father and grandfather lived here before me; and I were born here, sir.’

“‘Were you? That must have been very, *very* long ago.’

“‘Aye, sir; better than seventy year ago.’

“‘You don’t look as if you had ever been a little girl,’ said the young heir, gazing scrutinizingly at the snow-white hair and wrinkled face, now lit by a smile of admiration and amusement at his remarks. ‘Did you really run about, and play with toys? and what did you do for a nursery?’

“‘I didn’t need one, sir. My mother ——’

“‘Well, I don’t know what I should do without mine, I can tell you, though now I shall soon leave it,’ he added proudly; ‘for uncle is going to send me to school.’

“‘That’ll be nice for you, sir.’

“‘Yes, very. If I come home here in the holidays, I will come to see you, and tell you about it. I say, were you ever at school?’

“‘Never, sir. My father, he taught me to read, and write, and cipher; and that’s all the likes of me do need to know.’

“Edward gave another condescending glance round the cottage.

“‘I say, what’s your name?’

“‘Catherine, sir; but most folks calls me Cattie.’

“‘So shall I; it’s nice and short. Well, Cattie, what is that on your bed? rags sewn together?’

“‘’Tis patchwork, sir,’ said the old woman, looking slightly hurt; ‘’twas made by my great grandmother.’

“‘And has it lasted ever since?’ demanded Edward in a tone of wonder.

“‘’Twas thought that ’ansome, sir, ‘’twasn’t used till my mother’s time.’

“‘And what’s that chest, for your clothes? and that is the dresser? Well, you have plenty of plates and dishes, at any rate.’

“‘That I have, sir; plenty of everything.’

“Edward rested his chin on his hands, and nodded his curly head several times.

“‘Dear me!’ he exclaimed at length, ‘I do so wonder how you can like it.’

“‘’Twere no good for me not to like it,’ said Cattie, smiling again; ‘and I am sure I canna but like it when I consider who gave it me. ’Twas the good Lord, sir, as gave you the fine house below, and me this little place. ’Twas His wisdom as appointed it; and I’m not only satisfied, I’m far more than that; I’m thankful to Him for all His goodness to the likes of me, a poor sinner; and I ses to myself often and often, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”’ The distant clock chimed twelve, and the little visitor jumped up, and with a boyish cheery ‘Good-bye,’ was gone as suddenly as he had entered.

“But the remembrance of that fair-haired intelligent child never left old Cattie. Her thoughts loved to dwell on the bright, youthful apparition; and many, many times she wondered whether that lightly-made promise of another visit would ever be fulfilled.

* * * * *

“Five years passed away. Edward had been placed at school, and spent all his holidays with an uncle in Scotland. But one bright midsummer he came with his tutor to his own beautiful home, and his first care on arriving was to call on old Cattie. With sturdy footsteps he mounted the hillside, and after a vigorous climb arrived at the spot. But, lo! only a few stones remained of the pretty little cottage—a few blackened boards and crumbling walls—a heap of dust and rubbish, that was all. He walked round and round the fallen ruins of the little dwell-

ing, once so picturesque, so loved by its solitary occupant. Disappointed and alarmed, he went down to the village, some distance off, and made enquiries.

"The cottage had been burnt down in the winter, the villagers said. No one knew the cause of the accident; but old Cattie had escaped, and was now living in a little hut in a lonely lane beyond the park gates. Thither Edward directed his steps, and soon found the place—a wretched hovel, built of mixed mud and stone, the old moss-grown thatch hardly thick enough to keep out the winter winds and snows.

"Edward's stick was soon rattling against the shaky old door, till at the low cheerful answer from within he pushed it open, and peering into the dark interior of the old hovel, perceived the aged woman seated beside the fire, looking calm, placid, and contented as ever.

"The quiet old face brightened into a glad smile as she recognized him.

"‘Well, I have come to see you, Cattie; you know I said I would.’

"‘Yer welcome kindly, sir; yer welcome kindly; it does my old heart good to see yer blythe young face once more.’

"‘I went up to your own old cottage the first thing to look for you.’

"Cattie smoothed down her dark check apron with her old wrinkled hands, and raised her wistful eyes questioningly to his face.

"‘Yes, I saw it,’ he said, answering the mute glance; ‘and I was awfully sorry for you, Cattie; for I remember how you loved it.’

"‘Aye, aye, sir; aye, indeed I loved it; but it was the Lord’s will,’ she ended smilingly. ‘So ’twas all right, and for the best.’

"Edward gazed round the new abode with a depreciating glance.

"‘I say, who put you in here?’

“ ‘Twas Mr. Wright, your steward, sir; he said as I might have it free ——’

“ ‘Free! I should think so. Why didn’t he give you a better cottage, I should like to know?’

“ ‘If it was better, sir, the rent would be bigger; and ’tis a wonderful blessing for an old body like me to have no rent to make up; so ye see, sir, after all, ’tis better for me than the dear old place,’ she added, with tears glistening in her dim grey eyes.

“ ‘The young heir looked indignant.

“ ‘I can do nothing *now*,’ he said, ‘for my uncle looks after it all; but by-and-by, when I’m of age, Cattie, I will build you a bran-new cottage where the other one was, and you shall live there, without rent, to the end of your days.’

“ ‘Thank ye, Master Edward, thank ye hearty for the kind thought; but I shall have a better home ’gen then, sir, and shan’t need it.’

“ ‘Why, where?’

“ ‘I’ll be with my Lord, sir, I humbly trust; with my Saviour that has bought me with His precious blood—even me, an old sinner, to be His own. Bless you, sir, whiles I sit here a reading in my big Bible yonder of the many mansions He’s preparing above, I forgets the old place up on the hill, and only longs for the everlasting hills of Zion, where I shall see Him face to face, and be with Him, to praise Him for ever!’

“ ‘Edward gazed gravely at the rapturous expression that adorned that time-worn countenance.

“ ‘Is that how you contrive to be so perfectly contented, Cattie? I’ve often wondered at it.’

“ ‘Aye, sir, to be sure; just that, and nothink else. You are content and happy with your school, sir, aint ye?’

“ ‘Content!’ he echoed. ‘Why, Cattie, it’s the jolliest place possible! Lots of lessons, you know; only one must get through them somehow. But the games, and the rowing, and all the fellows, and ——’

“ ‘Well, sir,’ proceeded Cattie, as he paused, ‘aint ye through

it all looking forward to the time when ye'll live down beyond in your own fine house? and you just learns the lessons and plays the games to prepare yourself for it.'

"Quite so, Cattie; it's never out of my head, I can tell you. Why, that is the only thing that makes me bear the bother of learning!'

"'Just so, sir,' said Cattie, smiling. 'And now, can't ye understand how I can be happy here? aye, just as happy as I was up above there? for surely 'tis only a little time of preparation, till my Lord gives me the kingdom. Oh! is it any wonder, Master Edward, I should be satisfied now, when the glory and blessedness of my home is never out of my head? My dearie, don't let the hope of even your beautiful home here shut out from your heart your eternal home in the heaven with the Lord your Saviour, who loves you, and died to redeem you.'

"Edward listened gravely and reverentially. Old Cattie's faith and patience impressed him strongly, and a few moments afterwards he rose and took leave of her.

* * * * *

"Ten summers passed away, and the youthful heir had nearly completed his twentieth year. His coming of age was to be celebrated with the usual honours, and every tenant on his estate vied with each other in preparing a welcome for him; and when the day came at length, bright and fine, both house and grounds were decorated tastefully with flowers, banners, and evergreens; and long rows of plentifully-supplied tables were set down the smooth, close-shaven lawn for the repast that was to crown the pleasures of the day, and to which all without exception were invited.

"But there was one sweet, placid old face that the young heir sought in vain among his numerous guests; and no sooner were the complimentary speeches and replies over than Edward slipped away from the congratulatory throng, and directed his way to old Cattie's cot, burning to fulfil the promise he had made her.

"The little hovel stood in the quiet green lane, lonely and dilapidated as before. His gentle knock was unanswered. He pushed the door open, and entered.

"What a light beamed in old Cattie's eyes, as she turned her head on the pillow, and recognized him as he approached the bedside.

"'Well, Cattie,' he began cheerily, 'I missed you from amongst my well-wishers to-day, and I am sorry now to find you in bed.'

"'Not from amongst your well-wishers, sir, surely,' said the old woman, smiling. 'There aint a one as wishes all good for ye like my old self does.'

"'I have no doubt of it, Cattie.'

"'I've done more than wish ye well, sir,' said she earnestly; 'I have prayed for ye ever since this blessed day has dawned that brings you again to live amongst us. I haven't ceased to ask the great Lord to be your Saviour and guide for evermore.'

"The young man seated himself in silence on the three-legged stool by the fire he so well remembered in by-gone days, and gazed sadly at the Windsor chair now empty opposite him. Cattie's wistful eyes followed his glance.

"'Ah, sir,' she said, 'tis many a day now since I've sat there. I had a stroke, sir, or some'at as took all the power from my left side, and I've not been able to use it since. 'Tis the Lord's first message to me, Master Edward, to tell me to cheer up. 'Twill not be long now before He takes me home.'

"'But does no one look after you?'

"'Aye, sir, one of the neighbours is that good to me. I make sure 'twas the Lord told her I needed it, and sent her to me.'

"'But when she is not here, don't you find it very lonely?'

"No, sir, whiles it feels silent-like, and then I looks far beyond the clouds, to where my Lord sits on His throne in glory, and such a gladness and joy comes to me, when I think

I shall soon behold Him, as takes all thought of loneliness away.'

"'But, Cattie, you must not die till I have fulfilled my promise to you? Don't you remember about rebuilding your old cottage on the hill?'

"'I mind it, sir; and thank you kindly for thinking of an old body like me. I little dreamt then I'd hae lived to see the day ye come of age, Master Edward. I thought then that I'd hae come of age first myself, and ha' gone to my Lord's inheritance, as is laid up for them that love Him; but 'twon't be long, sir, not long now.'

"'How you wish for it, Cattie! I don't think I longed more for my majority than you do to die.'

"'Look what I am now, Master Edward—poor, old, and infirm, and then think that this corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal immortality. Oh, sir, 'tisn't that I long to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life.'

"'Cattie,' said the young man after a pause, 'I hope and trust that when my time comes I shall be as content to go.'

"'Content! as *happy*, Master Edward, that's the word. I pray the Lord it may be so; but we can't hope to die in the Lord, if we don't live in the Lord. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." If all our life is spent in the service of His enemy, what can we hope for when we come to the valley of the shadow of death? so I pray more than all that you may live to Him, His service your first object. And then, when death comes, there will be no need to fear; He that has led you through life will never leave you then; when thou passest through those deep waters He will be with you, be sure and certain of it, sir; He will never leave you, nor forsake you. May the good Lord my Saviour guide you by His counsel here, and afterward receive you to glory.'

"These were old Cattie's last words. Edward pressed her aged hands in silence, and went back to his friends and tenants,

back to the convivial tables, and the commendations and praises of his people; but old Cattie's dying words and final blessing were never forgotten through it all.

"Next day a neighbour went to her cottage as usual, and found the old woman lying tranquilly on the bed, asleep in Jesus, the Saviour this aged veteran had so devotedly loved, so faithfully served. And for Edward, a long life of usefulness and benevolence was followed by a death-bed as peaceful and hopeful as that of contented Cattie."

"I am glad the poor old woman lived till Edward came of age," said Augustus, when she had finished.

"I don't understand how she could be so happy with so little to make her so," observed Ada.

"She had the only one thing needed to make her truly happy," said Mrs. Stanton, "the only real abiding joy."

"Does being a soldier of the cross make one *always* happy?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Tom; enduringly happy. Will you come, and find it out for yourself, dear?" and she laid her hand caressingly on his shoulder. "Will you enlist under the glorious banner of the Prince of Peace, and taste and see how gracious our dear Lord is—how loving, patient, and compassionate? I could never describe to you the joy and consolation of His service, Tom; it is so rich in blessings, that to understand its fulness each must know it for himself."

"Tom is a wavering kind of soldier," said Augustus; "he does not stick faithfully to any cause."

"There is but one thing worth striving for," said Mrs. Stanton; "all others bring sorrow, anxiety, and remorse."

"That they do," said Tom earnestly.

"Why, have you experienced it?" asked Augustus sneeringly. Tom's cheek flushed.

"And only think whither they lead," pursued Mrs. Stanton solemnly. "All tend to eternal despair, and woe unutterable."

All were grave and thoughtful, and after a few minutes' silence their stepmother rose, and they turned their steps homeward.

Mrs. Stanton stopped at several of the cottages they passed by, to ask whether any one knew where the little deaf and dumb boy lived, but no one seemed to know anything of him ; and after a few equally fruitless enquiries in the village, they returned home.





CHAPTER V.

FAINT-HEARTED.

Disquieted in Gaiin.

THAT evening Augustus and Ada again held themselves coldly aloof from their young stepmother, their ire being once more roused by her persevering attempts to find the little boy, every question concerning him she had asked the cottagers being taken by Augustus as a personal insult, and resented accordingly ; so the elder brother and sister passed the whole evening in a *tête-à-tête* whispered conversation in the window, feeling the more deeply injured because in their secret hearts they envied the little ones her pleasant companionship.

After they had all at length retired to rest, a terrible thunder-storm came on, and poor Tom, who was naturally timid, and dreaded lightning above all things, lay wide awake, tossing about restlessly in his little bed, hiding his face at the momentary dazzling glare, and trembling violently at each reverberating peal of thunder. Alfred, who shared his room, already slept soundly ; and in his loneliness and fear, Tom's memory recurred to the stories his stepmother had related to them. As he recollected her few last words in the fields, a new fear awoke in his troubled mind, and he almost forgot that the thunder sounded fainter and further away, the lightning gleamed less brightly and more seldom, till a bright light struck across his eyes, more brilliant than any of the worst flashes. It did not flee away like the preceding ones, nor was it followed by a

resounding clap of thunder. Tom summoned all his courage, and peeped over the barrier of bed-clothes he had begun to raise in self-defence. Standing by Alfred's bed was his step-mother, with a candle in one hand, while with the other she gently arranged the coverlet. Then stooping over the sleeping child, she kissed his brow ; and advancing softly towards Tom, found his frightened blue eyes wide open, and fixed on her face.

"Mamma," he whispered.

"Yes, dear."

"Do you come every night to see us in bed?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling.

"Why?" he enquired.

"I like to see my little charges all safe asleep. Why are you awake, dear?"

"I don't know. Sleep seems to have gone away from me to-night."

"Why is that, Tom?"

"The lightning has been so vivid. Besides, I keep thinking, thinking, and it bothers so?"

She kissed his hot forehead.

"The storm is nearly over," she said gently ; "so you must try to go to sleep."

"I can't. I do so wish you had never told us anything about the armour."

"Why?" she asked in surprise.

"I was happy enough till you told us that first story," he replied, raising himself on his elbow. "I have felt uncomfortable and horrid ever since."

She laid the candle on the table, and sat down on the chair by his bedside.

"Don't you wish, dear child, to enter the army of the great King?"

"I can't enlist in it," said Tom, brushing two bright tears from his eyes.

“Why not?”

“I would not dare to begin, lest I should fail. It is such a high and holy thing, mamma. It makes me afraid to enter it; and yet what you said to-day in the field makes me afraid to stay away, and so—so I am miserable!” He sobbed quietly for a moment; then added hopelessly—“I know I should lose victory after victory, and the others would laugh so.”

“But why should you fail?”

“I could never go on fighting against myself,” said the boy, in a feeble, fretful tone. “I know I should perpetually want to do things I ought not. I could never resist; and perhaps even I might leave the army in the end. Gus says I am changeable, and have no courage or perseverance.”

“And let us suppose you were very determined, and had great courage and perseverance, do you think these things *only* are necessary to win a battle?”

“One could not do much without them.”

“No; they are important and necessary to a certain extent; but just as one glimpse of an old standard—torn, soiled, and riddled with shot—puts new hope and energy into the heart of the weakest soldier, so one earnest glance at the banner of love, stained as it is by the very life-blood of our great Commander, awakes in a man a new heart, and will, and desire, and sends him forth with fresh valour to the fight. Ah, Tom, *love* to Christ is the grand secret of courage, endurance, and victory!”

“How I wish I could see that banner!” cried Tom earnestly.

“Let me read you a description of what our Saviour’s love caused Him to endure for our sakes, and at the end of every verse, Tom, say two little words to yourself—“*For me;*” and may His great love constrain you, dear boy, and inspire you with a burning desire to enlist in His service, and endure any thing for His cause.”

She opened a Bible that lay near, and read the twenty-seventh chapter of St. Matthew’s gospel, pausing after each

solemn detail of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tears were rolling down Tom's cheeks as she finished, and great sobs shook his frame. "Mamma," he whispered, "I tried to say '*For me*' at first, but I could not go on, it seemed too much—too much, that He should have borne it all for me!"

"For your sins and mine, and those of the whole world, He was made sin—*He*, the spotless, pure, and Holy One, who knew no sin, that He might obtain eternal redemption for us, and purchase us unto Himself; to be His, and His for ever. Shall we not come heartily and earnestly to our Lord's side, and in His all-powerful strength strive manfully and boldly against the sin that cost Him so much?"

"Oh, yes; yes, mamma!"

She stooped to kiss him.

"Good-night, dear; you must no longer be afraid to enlist, lest you should fall away; no longer be disquieted in vain. Hope in God, trust His love, and pray to Him before you sleep; tell Him all you have told to me, and ask Him to clothe you in His holy armour, and to give you strength to fight against the foe. Yield yourself to Him—body, soul, and spirit—believing that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it unto the end." And so saying, Mrs. Stanton took up the candle, and went away, leaving the young recruit alone in the presence of the great Prince.

"Children," said Mrs. Stanton, as they all loitered about the dining-room after dinner next day, "I think I shall tell you a story before you go."

"The next letter is D," said Ada, throwing herself into an arm-chair.

"Yes; and the name of my little tale is, '*Disquieted in vain.*'"

Tom remembered her words of the preceding night, and looked at her earnestly. She smiled brightly, and drawing him into a seat next herself, began:

Disquieted in Vain.

“And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.”

NUM. xxi. 4.

“‘Aunt Esther,’ exclaimed Dora Delwood, throwing her arms round her kind aunt’s neck, ‘I cannot bear to leave you. I wish, oh, I wish Aunt Matilda had not arranged that I should live with her for the next five years! They will not be like these last five with you. I have been so very happy here.’

“‘You will, I trust, be happy there also, my child,’ said the old lady, warmly returning her caresses. ‘When people carry their chiefest happiness deep, deep down in their hearts, it matters comparatively little where or with whom they live.’

“‘Yes, aunt, I know; but that is the very thing that frightens me so. What will become of me if I forget God? and how can I think of Him, and be really happy in great noisy London? It will be so difficult to serve Him, or to try to please Him, when I am far away from everything I love most in the world. I mean you, dear auntie, and my poor people, and the little church, and Mr. Owens. Oh, what shall I do if I forget all you have taught me to love, and become gay and thoughtless, and learn to care for nothing but dress and amusements, like Eleanor and Geoffrey!’

“‘My dear, you must beware of judging your cousins by the short visit you had from them here last summer. Dressing well, according to the station and wealth with which God has endowed them, is no proof that they think of nothing else; neither is that gaiety of manner that delighted you so much any sign of forgetfulness of God. He looks not on the outward appearance, but observes the motives and sees the heart. If my little Dora’s happiness has been centred only in outward observances, such as caring for our poor, or the picturesqueness of our little church, or Mr. Owen’s weekly sermons, this change of home will be for the best; for it will show you, dearest, that true peace is to be found in none of these things, but only in

God Himself. To be reconciled to Him through the blood of the atonement sheds the calmest peace and deepest joy in the heart, and makes us tranquil and truly happy in the thickest of life's toil and turmoil.'

"'Oh, here comes the train! Good-bye, my darling auntie; won't you write to me *very* often? and when my education is finished, and I am grown up, and can do as I like, I shall come back here, if you will have me, and live in the dear old place all the rest of my life.'

"Aunt Esther kissed the bright, tearful face in sorrow too deep for words. It was a great trial to her to lose the sweet little companion she had had ever since her only sister died, and left her little girl to her care; but she knew that a better education than could be obtained in the remote country village was necessary for her little niece, and submissively committed her treasure to One in whose tender care she had long learned implicitly to confide, praying only that the long separation might be blessed to both, and that He would permit them, if in accordance with His divine will, to meet together again upon earth.

"The long railway journey was a dreary time indeed to the lonely little traveller, filled as her mind was with melancholy forebodings of the future. She dreaded the influences of her new home, the various scenes that would absorb and interest her, and tend to draw her mind from all that was good and right. If a faithful, consistent walk with God had been difficult in the dear, quiet, old home; if the best and holiest resolutions had been often broken, and there had been many wanderings into forbidden paths, what would be the consequence of such falls in the life she was about to enter! Could she then, as heretofore, flee to her Redeemer in deep repentance and earnest faith? or would she be filled with other occupations and amusements, and forget or put off all serious reflections? This question puzzled and grieved her sorely.

"'It was extraordinary how this great fear outweighed all

pleasant anticipations of the delights of sightseeing and amusement that were before her ; but Dora's heart's desire was to serve her God, the Saviour who had purchased her freedom at so great a price, even His own life-blood, and she did not perceive that in her sorrow and despondency she had laid down her arms, and thus gave a golden opportunity for the combined assault of Little-faith, Unbelief, and Distrust, who boldly availed themselves of it, and ceased not to beset and smite and buffet their timid trembling little victim.

"Dora was far too much engrossed in her own thoughts to notice the beautiful scenery through which she passed. She gazed out of the window with a tearful, vacant stare, too miserable to admire or even observe the wonders of God's fair creation outside it.

"Ah, if she had but remembered to cast the burden of her unfounded fears and over-anxiety on her heavenly Father—to grasp again the two-edged sword, lay hold once more of the golden shield, how her enemies would have vanished, and how much she would have found to interest and instruct her. The abundant foliage of the trees, still tipped with the exquisite lighter tints of spring, no less rich and shady than those at home ; the scattered wild flowers bending their dewy cups in the balmy breeze, as varied in shade and colour as those in her own sunny lanes ; the tender green shoots, peeping along the rough furrows, watered and cared for by the same heavenly Husband-man. How all nature seemed to be fraught with the power and love of its great Creator ! And 'if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?'

"But to Dora the shifting scenes brought no such message of hope and encouragement. Hitherto the calm, unvaried tenor of her cheerful country life had been unbroken, its happiness uninterrupted by a moment's anxiety or depression ; and now that these weird foes pressed upon her so suddenly, so grievously, she succumbed to their baneful influence, and allowed them to

weigh her down, so that each hour their power seemed to increase, and by the time she reached her destination she felt quite bewildered at the magnitude of her own forebodings, and wept uncontrollably. She had therefore but a cold, tearful greeting to bestow on her kind aunt and cousins, who were all at the station waiting to receive and welcome her.

“Dora’s first week in London, how is it to be described? The endless streets, the gay parks, the daily round of sight-seeing, all dazzled and delighted her. The feeling of disquietude and distrust with which she had arrived was a bad preparation for it all. She found it difficult to give her full attention even to the little time of morning and evening prayer, and almost impossible to bestow a thought on God during the day. Her mind was so full of anticipation of the wonders she was to behold, so surprised and enchanted with those she had seen, it seemed to leave room for nothing nobler and better, and every day of excitement and pleasure fostered and encouraged this distaste for her private devotions. But once or twice, at quiet moments, when obliged to pause and reflect whither it all was tending, she tried hard to rouse herself up to old feelings and hopes. With her face hidden in her hands, she endeavoured to shut out all the influences that surrounded her, and to imagine herself once more in the little bedroom inside Aunt Esther’s, where she had known so many peaceful, happy hours; but it was in vain that she strove to reawaken former impressions. They all seemed dead within her. The present would not be banished, the past refused to be recalled, and she assured herself that her first anxiety had been well founded, and that amid such distractions it was impossible to serve God; so she increasingly disliked and dreaded these little seasons of thought—conscience spoke so loudly at such moments—and avoided being alone in every way in her power.

“But a quiet day came at length, even to busy London. Her first Sunday morning in the great city dawned fair and bright; and with a heavier weight of sin and sorrow than her little

heart had ever borne, Dora went to church with her aunt and cousins.

“As she gazed around the crowded building, the fashionable gaily-dressed congregation, and the two strange clergymen, she longed inexpressibly for the little village church, the scattered groups of rustic worshippers, the old minister’s deep, full tones and solemn aspect, and, above all, Aunt Esther’s low, sweet voice in the singing. Dora sat, and knelt, and stood as the others did; but the very prayers appeared to be cold, formal, and far away; they seemed to contain no expression of her own desires and aspirations, as in her old home, where (so accurately did they express her feelings) she had often felt as though they had been written and composed to meet her own special case. Of the sermon she heard but little; for her wandering thoughts were uncontrollable. She caught herself up a hundred times, and fixed them stedfastly on the clergyman’s words; but they floated away again, she knew not how or why. They flew off to Aunt Esther, sitting all alone in the corner of the crimson-curtained pew; to Mr. Owens, who for five long years had scarcely ever missed her from both services; to old blind Martin, who knew her step so well, and always blessed her as she passed by; to Widow Stopton, to whom she always read on Sunday afternoon; to the excitement, amusement, vexation, and weariness of the past week; to anything and everything but where they ought to have been fixed; and the sermon began and ended without a word of comfort or warning reaching the dull ears of the faint-hearted little warrior, who needed it so sadly. No wonder she returned home feeling doubly dispirited and depressed; and there being no exciting scene to tempt her into forgetfulness, even Geoffrey and Eleanor observed the change, and did all they could, by kindness and cheerfulness, to rouse her to gladness, and brighten the grave little face into smiles again.

“None of the family thought of going to evening service, as it interfered with her uncle’s late dinner-hour, and it was with

mingled feelings of hope and despair that Dora begged to be allowed to go. She could not explain, even to herself, why she asked or desired it; the morning service had been so sad and unsatisfactory, it almost seemed to her a dishonour to God's house of prayer to bring such a cold, unwilling heart there again. But no laziness, weariness, or bad weather had ever kept her and Aunt Esther from evening service in the country, and she could not bear to contemplate such an outward falling away from all that had been most valued and enjoyed there.

"‘I must keep up a semblance at least; perhaps life will come,’ she said to herself, as, having obtained a kind but reluctant permission from her aunt, she crept out into the lighted streets, followed by one of the servants.

"‘Has my life been all pretence and unreality?’ she sadly thought. ‘Have I *never* been a soldier of the cross? *never* been arrayed in the armour? *never* fought a battle? My religion seems to have been like one of those flaring gas-lamps, bright enough when shielded by the glass shade of Aunt Esther’s piety and goodness, but blown out by the first puff of wind when it was removed. What ought I to do? Oh, can I never be happy, or at peace again? Never.’

"Her eyes were full of tears as she reached the church, and kneeling down in the low-cushioned pew, wept silently for a few minutes.

"The sweet impressive service began, and Dora rose and opened her prayer-book; but an unsettled feeling of the strangeness and novelty of all around still distracted and harassed her; the book sank gradually on the ledge in front, and her eyes again wandered to the showy bonnets, gay attire, and unknown faces of the congregation. How lonely it was to look round on the crowd, and think that no one knew or cared for her, no one seemed to observe her presence, and still less would one have remarked or regretted her absence.

"It was the eighth evening of the month. Dora listlessly found the place in the Psalms, and then gazed vacantly at the

stains and marks on the stone pillar opposite her. But what are those words that occur again and again throughout the monotonous reading? Dora's wandering attention is roused; she looks up, and listens suddenly, as if a strain of celestial music thrilled the air. Ah, those oft-recurring words, how sweet their tender hopefulness and trust!

“‘Why art thou so full of heaviness, O my soul; and why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy trust in God: for I will yet give Him thanks for the help of His countenance.’

“‘Put thy trust in God.’ The little sentence flashed like a gleam of light through her darkness. Where had she been groping to? What had she been feeling after? Her *own* religious impressions—her own good feelings.

“‘O put thy trust in God.’ There it is again in the short succeeding psalm.

“She bent her head and listened intently, with a heart that truly thirsted and panted after the water-brooks of the Fount of life.

“‘Put thy trust in God.’ How the words rung in her ears! What had she been doing all this week? Trying to awaken old associations, striving to renew past sensations, instead of fleeing at once to her God and Saviour. Was it a strange thing that she should be cast down, when, faint and thirsty by reason of the way, she had sought water in broken cisterns that could hold none, instead of turning in her need to the fountain of living waters, and having her cup filled to overflowing with the riches of His grace? Would the Captain of our salvation, He who had shed His life-blood to redeem her; who so loved, guided, and defended her in a comparatively quiet and easy part of the road, amidst those green pastures and still waters she had passed through in her happy secluded childhood, now leave her to perish from drought and weariness, when the way had become dry, parched, intricate, and dangerous? Not so. Whoso drinketh of the waters of earth may, nay *will*, thirst again; but whoso drinketh of the waters that Christ giveth

shall never thirst; for that water shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

“The little soldier raised her drooping head, and from the depth of a newly-awakened, adoring heart joined in the chant that followed the first lesson—‘My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.’ Then, with a truer, simpler, more personal love and trust in her Redeemer’s perfect and all-sufficient atonement than she had ever before experienced, she knelt and prayed.

“With a full heart she besought the Prince of Peace to cleanse the thoughts of her heart by His precious blood, and forasmuch as without Him she was not able to please Him, to grant that His Holy Spirit might in all things direct and rule her heart, that He would be her staff and stay throughout the rest of her pilgrimage, and that in His strength she might be more than conqueror.

“Anew, in prayer and faith, she buckled on her armour; and thus, fully equipped, and strong in the realization of her Master’s presence, she returned to her new home, there to discover, day by day, more and more of her own frailty and His strength to yield self-will daily, in submission to His will; to turn anxiety into prayer, despondency into trust; and to lead amid the tumult of a great city, to walk with God in perfect peace and full assurance of faith.

“And by-and-by, when the appointed time came, Aunt Esther’s many prayers were answered, and Dora Delwood returned to her loved home to engage again in her old avocations, no longer trusting to the sense of gratification which they in themselves might bring her, but finding her chiefest and best happiness in the ever-increasing knowledge of the love of her Saviour-God.”

They listened attentively to the end, and then all ran away to enjoy their half-holiday, except Tom, who lingered a moment to say,

“Did Dora Delwood never fear that she might wander away after that?”

“When she trusted her own heart, or depended at any time on her own resolves, she was sure to fall over and over again; but the little verse that recurred so often in that evening service was always remembered by her, and as, day by day, she learned to distrust herself, she clung more closely to her Saviour in humbler trust, deeper love, and stronger hope.”

“Then there is no end to the conflict?”

“It only ends with death, *then*, the fight over, the battle won, we enter into rest, the blissful rest that remaineth for the people of God.”

Tom seemed to be lost in thought; at length he looked up steadily.

“Mamma,” he said, “I will enlist.”

“Have you asked the Prince to help you? to cleanse you from all your sins in His precious blood, and clothe you in His bright, beautiful armour?”

“Yes, mamma, I asked Him last night when you left me—” He stopped short; for, looking up, he saw a row of laughing faces peeping through the window, and a flush overspread his cheek.

“They are waiting for you,” said his stepmother, following his glance.

“Yes,” he said hesitatingly; “but they can’t hear through the glass, can they?”

“I should think not; but even if they did, Tom, you must not begin by being ashamed of your banner.”

Tom’s only answer was a deep sigh. He turned slowly and reluctantly away, and left the room.





CHAPTER VI.

SORELY BESET.

Endure Hardness.

“**H**ERE comes this redoubtable warrior,” was Ada’s greeting, as Tom slowly crossed the lawn, and joined them under the horse-chestnut tree.

“What a dauntless bearing! what a resolute countenance!” cried Augustus, rolling up his eyes.

“Stop this nonsense, and come and arrange what we shall do this afternoon,” said Tom, making a great effort to look and feel good-humoured.

“That’s a strange beginning to his first sermon,” said Augustus, looking round on the others.

“Oh, good people are always eccentric!” laughed Ada.

Tom restrained his temper with a manifest effort.

“The battle wages fiercely within,” pursued his eldest brother, with a solemn shake of the head. “Tom *versus* Temper. I fear Temper is getting the best of it; Tom was never much of a soldier, at least when he was on our side.”

“How long is this kind of chaff to go on?” asked Tom, almost trembling with the long strain of self-control.

“Till you throw down your fine new armour.”

“That I shall never do,” he retorted sturdily.

“Is he not wondrous brave all of a sudden,” laughed Ada; “it is really quite edifying.”

“His endurance is so touching,” chimed in Gus.

"It is a great shame to tease him so," said Alfred, while Katie gazed pensively from one face to another.

"Well, if we choose to worry him, it is no business of yours," said Augustus, catching the little fellow, and administering a slight box on the ear.

Tom's temper was restrained no longer; he sprang upon Augustus, and retaliated with vigour.

However, he had little chance against a strong lad, taller and older than himself, and was soon sprawling full length on the grass, with Augustus' knee planted firmly on his chest.

"Let me get up," gasped Tom, struggling violently.

"Not till you beg my pardon."

"That I shall never do!"

"Not even if I keep you here till teatime?"

"Not if you keep me till bedtime."

"It is only just to apologise," said Ada; "for you struck the first blow."

"I don't care."

"The great foe called *Pride* is coming out against him now," said Augustus mockingly; "we shall soon see how Tom deals with him."

"Now that he has surrendered to *Temper*," said Ada, "he will not hold out long against *Pride*."

"I don't know whether there is a foe called *Unforgiveness*," said Augustus; "but if there is, I expect he is having a thrust at him too, poor fellow! He is sorely beset at the outset."

There was so much truth in these mocking words, they wounded Tom to the quick. He increased his endeavours to free himself, but said not a word.

"I think this is a very stupid play," remarked Katie.

"It's no play," returned Augustus; "it's the most serious battle that ever was fought."

"Then I wonder you dare to turn it into ridicule," cried Tom exasperated.

"I don't," retorted Augustus; "I honour and respect it. If I was fit to enter it, I don't at all know but that I might enlist. Why, you foolish fellow, don't you know that it is your little sneaking, cowardly self that I laugh at!"

"I wish you would stop arguing about it," sighed Katie; "I want so much to go to the village, and spend the money that papa gave me."

"Oh, I do declare, this is Saturday!" cried Augustus, relaxing his hold on Tom in his surprise. "If we don't set off at once, the market carts will have left Oxondown, and we shall find nothing worth laying it out upon."

With a violent wrench Tom broke away from him, and rising to his feet with a flushed, angry face, brushed the dust from his clothes.

"Let him off this time," said Ada, as Augustus made a feint of recapturing him.

"Yes, I believe I will; I am sure he is not worth all the trouble he has given me. If I were mamma, I should have tried to find a better recruit; even Katie has more pluck."

"I shall buy some peaches and a packet of Mrs. Wilson's almond sugar-plums."

"I hate almonds; those mixed sweets are rather jolly. I say, Temper, are you coming?"

Tom turned away in silence.

"Don't ask him," said Ada; "you know he can't bear spending a penny."

"I tell you why," said Augustus mischievously, as they all walked off; "he wants to give it all to the collection in church to-morrow."

"I doubt that," cried Ada laughing. "You know, Private Miser and Sergeant Hoard-it-up are very strong enemies to the Sunday collections."

Tom heard all this, and the laugh of derision that accompanied it, as he turned back to the rustic seat, and the truth of it stung him painfully. He was fond of money; there was no

doubt of that; and as he thought over the whole of his brother and sister's bantering conversation, and his own consequent loss of temper, patience, and brotherly charity, he was more utterly miserable than he ever remembered feeling in his life. Remorse and Despair then attacked him, and brought the burning tears welling into his eyes, when the drooping boughs suddenly parted, and Mrs. Stanton appeared.

"Tom," she exclaimed in great surprise, "I thought I saw you all going off towards the village."

"The others have gone," said Tom, dashing away the unwelcome tears. "I did not care to go with them."

"Why?"

"Because," he answered vehemently, "they are hateful."

"Oh, Tom!"

"Yes, *hateful*," he vociferated. "It is just as Augustus said. I shall give up this warfare too. I am not fit to be any one's soldier, much less to join in a holy strife like that we spoke about this morning."

"What has occurred since?"

"Everything to deter and hinder me—their unkindness, and mockery, and cruel chaff; and—and—worse than all, the very foes I had determined to resist overcame me at the very outset. I'm not fit in any way to be a soldier."

"Did you ever think you were?"

"I thought—I hoped, with the great Prince's help, I might struggle on."

"And did you seek His help?"

"I did last night."

"Yes, when you were in comparative peace; but how was it when the enemies came round?"

"I—I don't know," hesitated Tom. "There were such a multitude of them, without and within, I felt so helpless—so unable to check them."

"And when you felt your own inability to cope with them, did you take refuge under the Banner?"

"No; I did not think about it; I couldn't. They tormented me so; it was impossible to bear it."

"Yes, alone; but at the first hurting word, Tom, had you thought of the awful mocking, scourging, suffering, I read to you last night, and whispered to yourself once more, '*For me,*' and looking by faith to dear Master, breathed one short mental prayer to Him for help, then answered your brother and sister, and all your hidden invisible foes, in His strength, meekness, and love, you would have come from your first battle more than conqueror."

"I see what you mean, mamma; but, oh, you can scarcely imagine how hard it was!"

"A good soldier must make up his mind to endure hardness ——"

"Here they come," cried Tom, as the sound of merry voices broke the still air. "I cannot stay to meet them."

"Why not, Tom? Ashamed of your colours?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then sit down again, dear boy, and let us wait for them; for I am going to tell you all another little story."

The rest of the children came flocking in, laden with good things of every description; and taking no notice of Tom, hailed the prospect of another story with delight, and gathered round, devouring their purchases, Alfred only offering to share his with his stepmother, and taking compassion on Tom's longing eyes, held out a paper of sugar-plums to him, while Mrs. Stanton began her next story, entitled—

Endure Hardness.

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."—2 TIM. iv. 3.

"What is your name?"

"Ernest Edderby."

"Who's your father?"

"Papa's dead this long time."

“ ‘What was he?’

“ ‘A clergyman.’

“ ‘Have you a mother?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Have you brothers?’

“ ‘No.’

“ ‘Sisters?’

“ ‘Yes, one.’

“ ‘Is she pretty?’

“ ‘I think so—very.’

“ ‘Humph!’

“This big boy passed on, and another took his place, repeating the same string of questions; then another, and another, and sometimes the same boys over and over again, till poor Ernest’s lips trembled as he answered; and it was only by a strong effort he restrained an unmanly flood of tears, and gave the same replies with courtesy and good temper.

“What boy has forgotten his first night at school? Is there one who does not look back with the pitying condescension of his maturer years and experience to the sense of loneliness and desolation that oppressed him then?—the home-sickness, the yearning for a mother’s presence, the nervous dread of his apparently unfeeling companions, the constant watchfulness lest some unseen snare, some cruel trick or practical joke, should surprise or terrify him; the weariness of being continually on his guard; all alone in the crowd, with no friend to trust or confide in?

“Ernest Edderby was drinking this bitter cup to the dregs on this his first night at Heathfield School. What provocation had he given his new schoolfellows that they should all conspire to persecute him so relentlessly? Was it because he read a few verses of his Bible, after kneeling to offer his evening prayer, that two or three came up to him with faces of mock humility, and begged to be informed ‘what text he was selecting for his sermon’?



"This big boy passed on, then another and another, till poor Ernest's lips trembled as he answered."

"ENDURE HARDNESS."

Page 76.

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“With what intense pain he heard the smothered tittering that resounded on all sides when he bent his head and folded his hands to murmur a few words of prayer before reading! And yet there was scarcely a boy among them that had not himself, a minute or two before, knelt for a few moments by his bedside. What did they mean by it?

“Ernest lay revolving this difficult question in his mind when the gas had been turned off by one of the masters; and except for a few whispers down the long dormitory, the room was comparatively quiet. He caught the word *launching* two or three times in the low conversation carried on between his next neighbours, and wondered whether boating was one of the half-holiday amusements; if so, what an expert oarsman he would show himself to be; how he would make the most of the skill attained by long practise on the grand rocky coast near his dear old home, and gain, perhaps, their admiration, or at least, their respect, by some act of unusual daring! At last the subdued tones sunk into perfect stillness; and with anticipations of mingled hope and anxiety for the morrow, his weary eyes closed in sleep.

“A tremendous crash! an awful sense of having fallen down a precipice, followed by the stifling sensation caused by masses of fallen rocks and earth crushing him down on the hard earth beneath! Ernest opened his terrified eyes on utter darkness, and collecting all his strength for one great effort, contrived to drag himself from beneath the cumbrous weight that held him down; and crawling out on hands and knees from beneath it, trembling from head to foot, he realized, to his mingled relief and dismay, that two heavy mattresses and all his bed clothes had been turned over him out upon the floor by some invisible agency.

“Distressed and irritated beyond measure, he seated himself on the wreck of his comfortable bed, and sobbed aloud. This was at once checked by sundry sighs and groans from the other beds, accompanied by hoarse, sleepy commands to ‘shut up.’

“With infinite difficulty he contrived to drag out a pair of blankets, and throwing himself upon the dishevelled heap, with bitter tears and smothered sobs he cried himself to sleep.

“He was awoke by something heavy falling across his feet, and starting up, found that one of his smaller school-fellows had, in jumping over him with the others from bed to bed, missed his footing and fallen down on him. Ernest sat upright, rubbed his swollen eyes, and determined within himself, in the freshness of first awaking, to try to endure hardness with a braver, manlier spirit than had been possible for him to accomplish yesterday.

“He dressed himself in silence, taking no notice whatever of the others, and they seemed disposed to leave him alone. But the moment he took out his Bible the loud tittering and whispering around began, and made it impossible for him to fix his attention. After gazing vacantly at the open page and familiar words, that seemed for the time almost bereft of meaning, he sighed, and put it reluctantly away.

“Poor little soldier, accustomed to the solitude and quiet of his own room at home, where he could many a time realize that he was alone with God, and worship Him without let or hindrance, this was a new and painful experience for him.

“He little dreamt that the knowledge that strangers were observing him narrowly influenced his manner, and even altered his face. He knew not that he had taken out his Bible with an air of solemn ostentation that set them all laughing, and had then gazed around on them with a glance of serious reproof that provoked them to continue their interruptions with tenfold ardour. Above all, he thought so much of the effect his actions would produce on them as to forget the great Captain he was about to approach, and whose orders for the day were in that written message.

“‘How did you like the launch?’ asked one big fellow.

“‘Lunch!’ said Ernest, surprised. ‘When? Yesterday? Very much. I had veal and ham sandwiches.’

The roar of laughter that greeted this reply made him stop hastily.

“‘The *launch*, you little muff.’

“‘I was not here for it,’ replied Ernest, with an effort to be good-humoured. ‘What was the name of the boat?’

“‘The *Earnest Pastor* was her name. She set sail from a port near here called “Slumbering Cove,” but was wrecked disastrously.’

“Something in the other boys’ faces of preternatural gravity roused Ernest’s suspicions.

“‘You mean *me*,’ he exclaimed, as the truth flashed suddenly on him. ‘It was a nasty cowardly trick. A big fellow like you ought to be ashamed of it.’

“‘Holloa!’ retorted his tormentor sharply. ‘Let me hear no more of that style from you, or I shall let you know by experience what a licking means. I dare say it is associated in your innocent mind with a lollipop; but I could show you it had some reference to a donkey.’

“This obscure threat won for the speaker the applause of all around, and Ernest’s fast-beating heart was relieved by the school bell, which rang at that moment, and they all trooped off, leaving the new-comer to follow at his leisure.

“How wretched he felt all that long morning; but study seemed peaceful and pleasant in comparison of his anticipations of the noontide play-hour, and it was with many dreary forebodings of what new species of persecution might be in store for him that he at length followed the noisy troop out to the playground.

“Some of them were already kicking about the foot-ball; but one boy was sitting alone on a log of wood that lay in the well-trodden grass, sobbing dismally. The rest took no notice of him; but Ernest watched him with a hesitating, doubtful face for some time, and at length slowly drew near, and asked him what was the matter?

“The boy wept louder.

“Ernest stood by looking distressed.

“‘Won’t you tell me? Can’t I do anything for you?’

“‘I’m so wicked,’ cried the boy, without raising his face, each word broken by a long-drawn gasp for breath. ‘I used to read my Bible like you; I long to be good, but don’t know how to begin.’

“Ernest’s hopes rose. Was it possible the influence of his example was already beginning to make itself felt.

“‘There is only one way to be good,’ he began softly and gravely, when one of the deep-drawn sobs ended in a sound suspiciously like a genuine burst of laughter, and unable to dissemble any longer, the boy raised his head, and tumbling off the old log, fell down on the grass, shaking all over with shouts of merriment, shared heartily by several of the others who had gathered round.

“‘Why could you not hold out a little longer?’ exclaimed one of them. ‘The rector would have given us *such* a sermon.’

“Blushing crimson, and literally quivering with indignation, Ernest turned from them, and rushed away, down a shady road hard by, and into a little wood, where he threw himself at the foot of an old oak, and cried as if his heart would break.

“There he lay the whole play-hour, listless, dejected, and utterly miserable, till the loud summons rung out from the distant belfry, when he rose and crept slowly home, encouraging every faltering step with the hope that the others would be already in their places.

“No such good fortune awaited him; there they all were, straggling along the shady road, evidently on the look-out for him.

“He crept closer and closer to the high overhanging hedge, hoping even yet to elude them; but one laughed and pointed towards him; and finding concealment impossible, he summoned all his failing courage, and advanced boldly to the encounter.

“Poor little soldier! Beneath that brave outer aspect was a faint, throbbing heart; and though the great invisible Captain

was close beside him, only waiting to strengthen and comfort him, he strode on, without one mental upward glance, or one mute prayer for aid. They did not speak as he came near; only two of them, walking arm-in-arm, jostled roughly against him as he passed. Then, apparently covered with confusion and regret, hastily began to apologize.

“Ernest was about to reply, when the titter that passed from lip to lip convinced him the rudeness was intentional, and checked his civil rejoinder.

“‘Can’t you let the fellow alone?’ interposed one round-faced, good-natured-looking boy, the only one in the school that had not, by word or deed, joined in annoying him.

“‘What! you *too* Davis? The school will soon change its character, if this goes on. Please, sir,’ added this incorrigible lad, standing directly in front of Ernest to prevent his getting away, ‘one word with your reverence. Your ministerial efforts are so untiring among us, that ever since you honoured us poor heathen with your presence, it has been our chief desire to find a curate to aid in carrying out your good works. I believe we are now so fortunate as to have found a young man in every respect worthy of your patronage, who burns with an inward craving to promote your pious endeavours on our behalf.’

“Ernest pushed him angrily away.

“‘There’s temper there,’ sighed the boy solemnly, lifting his eyes to the sky, after returning the push with interest; ‘temper that one would wish to see eradicated. It testifies strongly to the deep depravity of the human heart, when so eminent a Christian should be thus sadly in need of self-control.’

“There was an element of truth in the scoffing words that added tenfold to their sting. The flush deepened in Ernest’s cheeks. With a desperate rush forward he broke through the laughing group, and dashing into the empty schoolroom, hid his face in his hands. The second bell rang, and the rest came noisily in. Hard work obliged them to leave him in comparative peace for the next three hours; and he was no sooner

released from his lessons, than he ran up to the dormitory, opened his portmanteau, and took out his writing materials. An idea had struck him, and he was hastening to put it into execution. He took a sheet of note paper, and began in rather a shaky round hand: 'My dearest Mother,—School is unendurable. Please take me away at once; for I——' There he stopped short. The picture rose vividly to his mind of the grieved expression on her gentle face when she would read the contents of her boy's first letter home; and bending his head on his desk, the tears of anger, mortification, and grief once more rolled down his cheeks.

"Her last few words now occurred to him with a power they had not borne at the time: 'Read the Bible daily, my son; and never forget to pray.' Gradually the choking sobs ceased. With one hurried glance around, to be assured he was alone, he knelt, and poured out his heart to his glorious Captain, recounting simply and unreservedly his failings, trials, and great loneliness, and rose calm, subdued, and refreshed beyond measure. After one more hesitating glance round, he raised the cover of his little Bible. What were the first words that met his eye? 'Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' The sharp two-edged sword of his Prince pierced through the thick veil of trial and persecution that surrounded him; and never before had the message been so inestimably precious to his heart.

"'Endure hardness.' How well that described his troubles, enduring the hardness of his school-fellows, and, more than all, the hardness of his own impatient, rebellious heart! *Endure?* How? With patience and saintly forbearance? Far more even than that.

"'Endure with *cheerfulness*. 'My brethren, count it all *joy* when ye fall into divers temptations.' *Joy?* Ah, that was the secret! to go forth with joy, and kindness, and good-humour, to meet his companions. But it was not an easy attainment; his recent experience told him that of himself it was impos-

sible ; so once again he sank upon his knees, and sought this wondrous grace where alone it could be found, praying his great Commander to array him in the whole armour of God, that he might have strength to carry His banner of love amongst the others ; then laying aside the little book that had just thrown such a light on his path, he ran downstairs, and joined the others in the playground.

“He took no notice of a mocking bow that greeted his arrival, stepped quietly over a leg thrust out to trip him up, and with a pleasant tone and bright, genial smile offered to help to disentangle a long kite-tail on which a few younger boys were busily engaged. The offer occasioned such surprise that he got no answer ; but, nothing daunted, he gave his aid skilfully and readily, and joined as heartily and merrily as any of them in the game that followed.

“‘What had come over young Goodie?’ one boy asked another, but got no reply but a shake of the head. More than one felt that the question was utterly unanswerable ; and many among them, who thought religion a dull, gloomy thing, little knew where his smiles came from, or the sweet light that shone in his eyes, and showed itself in his cheerful, obliging manner. There was no ostentation, no effort to court observation in the way Ernest took out his Bible that night. He was weary and thirsty by reason of the way, and with his whole heart sought the water of life. Boys are quick to observe these things, and not a word was uttered to interrupt or annoy him as he found there abundantly what he sought ; and with sweet peace and joy in his heart he laid him down to rest.”





CHAPTER VII.

POPE'S HOLLOW.

Friendless.

“**I** LIKE that story almost the best of all,” said Augustus, when his stepmother had finished ; “*that* little fellow was a brick, not like someone else I know,” and he glanced meaningly at Tom, who neither answered by word or look.

“Children,” said Mrs. Stanton, “I have ordered the pony-phæton to be at the door in an hour. Aunt Charlotte and I have been talking about Pope’s Hollow ; she knows where it is, and thinks, if we drove there, we might be able to find the poor little deaf and dumb boy.”

“Bother !” said Augustus ungraciously.

“Would any of you like to come ?”

“Suppose we go, Gus,” said Ada ; “there is nothing better to do at home.”

“All right ; but if he thinks he is going to get back the half-crown he is mistaken ; for I have just spent every farthing of it.”

“I think I asked you not to do so,” said Mrs. Stanton gravely.

“Farmer Holt’s fruit was irresistible, and not being as valiant as Tom, I could not resist the temptation.”

“You are not as much to be blamed as Tom is,” said Ada ; “for you are an open rebel, and don’t pretend you have enlisted.”

"Perhaps Augustus intends to enlist," said his stepmother, looking earnestly at him.

"Who knows but I may, some fine day," said Augustus, turning away to avoid her gaze.

"I suppose," said Ada, "the hour must be nearly over by this time, and the carriage will come round directly."

Mrs. Stanton rose, and the little party dispersed, the children meeting a few minutes afterwards upon the steps, whence they all packed themselves into the little phaeton.

"Is not mamma ready?"

"Yes; she is gone into the drawing-room to Aunt Charlotte."

"How absurdly attentive to her mamma is; from the time Aunt Charlotte comes down every day, she is always reading to her, or chatting, or putting her knitting right," said Ada.

"I like her for it," said Augustus; "I never saw Aunt Charlotte looking so placid and happy as she has since mamma came."

Mrs. Stanton appeared that moment in the doorway, and there was something so attractive in the sweet, bright face, and so much unconscious grace in her quiet movements, as she smiled and came towards them, that when she stood waiting expectantly on the steps, Augustus felt involuntarily compelled to dismount from his seat, and give her his hand to step into the carriage. She sat beside him, and he took the reins; Katie and Alfie were seated at their feet, while Tom and Ada were perched behind.

Pope's Hollow was a narrow gorge between two hills, both of which contained some valuable mines. It was a small scattered hamlet of miners' cottages, about three miles from Oxondown, and boasted of neither church nor school.

The Stanton's drove up the winding lane, that seemed to be the principal street, making enquiries of all they met for the little deaf and dumb boy. No one seemed to know anything about him, and Mrs. Stanton had almost given up the search as useless. Augustus was fast losing his temper, when a little girl

came by, carrying a huge bundle of sticks upon her head, and looking more intelligent than the other wayfarers. In reply to their question, she pointed out a small mud hut on the side of the hill.

"Are you quite sure he lives up there?" asked Mrs. Stanton.

The child put up her thin red arm to hold the faggot, while she gave her head a knowing little nod.

"You surely are not thinking of climbing up there?" said Augustus, reluctantly drawing in the reins; "very likely he is not at home."

"We must take our chance for that," said Mrs. Stanton, smiling.

The little girl watched them all alight with great interest.

"Could you find us someone to hold the pony?" asked Mrs. Stanton.

"I'll hold him myself," said the child, dexterously swinging the great bundle of wood from her head. "He won't bolt, will he?"

"No; he is quiet enough," said Augustus. "You need not touch his head; just stand by him, and he won't move."

She gazed at the pony's dark glossy coat, bright harness, and crimson rosettes in great admiration; and the little party set off up the hill, and after a somewhat steep ascent, knocked at the door of the hut.

There was some movement inside, and it was opened by the boy they sought.

He looked at the well-dressed strangers in amazement, till his eyes encountered those of Augustus; then he darted back into the wretched hovel, and was gone in an instant.

Augustus burst out laughing; Mrs. Stanton looked much disappointed.

"We may as well go home again," said Ada. "He won't appear again while we have Gus with us."

"Some one else may be at home," suggested Mrs. Stanton, and she knocked gently. A shrill voice seemed to make some

sort of reply, and pushing the door open, they entered a bare place, little better than a shed, the uneven floor of hard-trodden clay, without fireplace or furniture. No one seemed to be within, and the children looked round the desolate room in disgust.

"That's another room, perhaps," said Alfred, pointing to a kind of gap in the old wall. Augustus peeped in, and instantly the poor deaf and dumb boy rushed from it, and breaking through them in terror, dashed out at the front door, and was out of sight in a moment.

"Who answered our knock?" asked Mrs. Stanton, when she had recovered from the surprise.

"There is a sick woman inside," said Augustus, shuddering; "at least, she is lying on some straw, and looks dreadful."

"Go outside, dears, and wait for me," said Mrs. Stanton, as she disappeared into the inner apartment.

The shrill, meaningless sounds that had greeted their entrance were now heard again, and the children were not sorry to obey.

"I am glad you did not see the woman, Ada," said Augustus; "her face would haunt your dreams. Her eyes looked wild and staring, and her cheeks were sunk in like two hollows."

"Perhaps that is the reason they gave that name to this dreadful place," said Alfred in a subdued voice.

"Nonsense, child," said Ada, laughing; "it is Pope's Hollow; and I dare say the Pope's cheeks are quite plump, like your own."

"Well," said Augustus gravely, "do you know the boy who stole my half-crown had his eyes sunk far back in his head."

"I expect it's from hunger," said Tom. "Don't you remember, Grimes said there was a strike here, and they were all starving?"

Mrs. Stanton came out of the hut at that moment, looking very pale and sad.

"I wonder where they get things here?" she whispered, looking almost as awe-struck as Alfred; "I mean bread, or milk, or something to eat."

"I saw a little hole of a place as we came up here," said Tom, "with some loaves in the window."

Mrs. Stanton took out her purse. "Try what you can get me, dears ; milk especially, if it is possible."

Awed and subdued by her manner, the children hurried away, and soon returned triumphant with a huge loaf and a cup of milk. Mrs. Stanton took them into the cottage.

"Mamma looks quite frightened," said Katie tremulously.

"If you caught the glimpse that I did of her patient, you would not be surprised," said Augustus soberly.

They waited for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then Mrs. Stanton came back again.

"It is getting late," she said ; "Aunt Charlotte will be uneasy if we don't return. I wonder who takes care of this poor woman."

"What is the matter with her, mamma?" asked Ada curiously, as they descended the hill.

"I cannot tell, dear. She seems delirious, and utterly prostrate from starvation."

"Perhaps this little girl knows about her," said Tom, as they approached the carriage.

Mrs. Stanton made many enquiries of her, and discovered she was the daughter of the poor woman, and Rolf, the deaf and dumb boy, was her only brother. "Father had left the place to find work, and mother held up for a long time ; but we had scarcely enough to keep us alive ; no, nor haven't now. Latterly mother had become crazed. She was orful, and tore everything about like mad. No one could do nothink with her but Rolf, till starvation made her take to her bed, and now she lay quiet enough."

Such was the child's account, and tears glistened in Mrs. Stanton's compassionate eyes as she listened.

"Does any one about here know you?" she asked.

"Aye ; Mr. Hewitt does. Father worked nigh two years under him in the mines yonder, and mother took in his washing. He be a very good old gent, that he be."

"Where does he live?"

"In the white house, the big one by the roadside. You'll pass it on yer way back."

Mrs. Stanton put a few shillings into the child's thin bony hand; and promising to call again, they all drove away.

Augustus drew up before the little wicket that led into a pretty white house, and Mrs. Stanton walked up to the front door, and was soon admitted. In a short time she returned, saying as they drove homeward:

"I saw this Mr. Hewitt, and he speaks well of this poor family."

"Does he know the boy?"

"Yes; and says he is thoroughly honest, intelligent, and most willing to work. He knew them all when in comparative comfort, but has lost sight of them since the strike. He was very kind, and promised to send one of his own servants to attend the poor woman."

"What a dreadful thing a strike is!"

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Hewitt recommended the boy very highly, and begged me to find some employment for him; so I said I should be glad if he would come every day for a few hours to help the gardener."

"And the poor little girl!" said Katie pityingly. "I wish we could do something for her."

"What a life of trial and privation hers must be!" sighed Mrs. Stanton; "her mother a lunatic; her only brother deaf and dumb; no work to be obtained, and scarcely anything to eat!"

"I did not know there was so much misery in the world," observed Tom.

"Painful as it is to witness it, it is far better for us to know something about it," said Mrs. Stanton; "and, oh, how blessed to be able in any degree to relieve it!"

"It has put us all into the blues," said Augustus, beginning to whistle, and cracking the whip, with a poor assumption of gaiety.

"I tell you what will brighten us up," cried Tom; "mamma will tell us a story."

"Give me a moment to collect my thoughts," said Mrs. Stanton, smiling. "What is our next letter?"

"F, I think."

"Well, then, I shall call my little tale

Friendless.

"There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."—PROVERBS xviii. 24.

"The evenings were beginning to close in early; white frosts and dense damp fogs clouded the mornings; gleams of sunshine illumined the afternoons, and the nights were intensely cold.

"The bright transient afternoon rays were fast fading into twilight, when the broken casement of a mud-hovel, that stood by the side of the highroad, opened cautiously and noiselessly, a little dirty tear-stained face peeped out, gave one frightened glance around, and disappeared again.

"A few minutes afterwards a ragged shawl, patched and faded, was thrust through the little window, and dropped on the frost-hardened mud outside. Another long silence, one more hasty glance of the same black head up and down the road, and the small thin hands lifted carefully out a little black kitten, laid it gently on the sill outside, and tried, by coaxing and persuasive whispers, to induce it to jump to the ground; but puss mewed dismally, humped her long back, and steadily refused to comply. At last the little trembling hands were obliged to give it a gentle push towards the edge. Pussy fell over, alighted safely on its legs, gave piteous glances upward, and mewed loudly and pathetically as she raised her little snow-white paws, one after another, from the cold hard soil. Once more the sad little face appeared in the window, this time followed by the thin bare shoulders, which even in the fast-fading light showed many marks of cruelty and ill-usage. With infinite difficulty the poor ragged creature crawled through the

small aperture, jumped lightly to the ground, and wrapping kitty and herself carefully up in the old shawl, she gave another hasty look down the long white road, and ran nimbly and swiftly away, leaping from heap to heap of frost-bound mud, and keeping well in the shadow of the thick hedge.

"On she fled, breathing a sigh of relief as she darted past the sunken lichen-covered stone that marked one mile from Tellworth. On and on, till deeming herself safe from immediate pursuit, her light step flagged, and she fell into a walking pace.

"*'We'se safe now, kitty,'* she whispered, in soft tones of encouragement, as though it were the cat that (of these two solitary creatures) most needed comfort. *'She'll never catch us again; never. 'Twere a thousand million times better to die by the roadside than to be beaten by her again; aint it, my own pretty little kitty?'*

"The little animal purred comfortably in reply; it certainly had the best of it, resting warm and cosy in its little mistress' caressing arms. Twilight had deepened into night, and the bright stars came out one by one in the dark sky, and shone with their serene, quivering radiance on the little homeless ones, still treading their lonely way onward, till utter exhaustion at length made the little girl stop at an old stile by the road side, and sit down for a few minutes to rest. She had met no one on the road during those four long miles, and she calculated that she might indulge in one hour's rest with comparative safety.

"*'Tis like she won't foller me at all to-night,'* she murmured, as she arranged her sleepy charge in a comfortable position in her lap. *'Oh, kitty, kitty, sleep away, dearie; Tom will never hang ye now, for your own Nanny will save you yet!'*

"Pussy stuck out her white paw, and rested her little black nose composedly on it, as if she comprehended all, and was eager to tender a prompt obedience.

"The child rested her weary head on the upper wooden bar, and tried to keep her heavy eyelids from closing, but all in

vain. Not many minutes had elapsed, when she lost all consciousness of her situation in sleep. When she awoke the dawn was just breaking in the eastern sky; the poor little desolate creature shivered in the intense cold of the morning air that was bowing the tall trees that overhung the road, and shaking down the diamond dewdrops that hung like glassy beads to every blade and leaf, and glittered in rainbow hues on the large round webs in the hedgerows.

"Kitty had slept fast and warm in the folds of the shawl, and now purred a morning greeting, thrusting her head lovingly into the pale, thin face of her mistress, and rubbing her soft warm fur against her cold bare arms.

"'We'll go on a bit now, my kitty,' said Nanny. 'Oh, you want to walk, do you? Well, so you shall; but keep close to me. I ha'n't got no friend in all the world but yourself, my pussy, remember that. Aint it pretty watching the day break like real gold in the sky? I wish I warn't such a bad girl, kitty, and then perhaps I'd go up behind there some day. Let's run a bit. It's dreadful cold, and my bones ache. Yours don't, do they, dearie? Every step we takes brings us further and further from aunt and cruel Tom. They won't catch us again, will they?'

"All that cold autumn day kitty and her mistress walked onwards. She begged a piece of bread as they passed through a village, which she tried to induce her kitten to share.

"The poor forlorn child had formed no plan. Her only thought was to get far away from her wretched home, and to put many miles between her and those who had so cruelly ill-treated her. Thus she wandered aimlessly on till evening, foot-sore and weary, and about sunset turned into a grassy walk through a well-kept plantation. The soft sward was pleasant to her tired feet, and she pursued her way unmolested.

"At length the path sloped downwards, and brought her to a rushing stream, turbid and swollen from recent rains. It was spanned by a single plank of wood. The deepening twilight

was almost darkness down here amongst the trees ; and after a long pause of consideration she took kitty in her arms, and proceeded to cross it. About half way the board shook, and half turned round. She tried to save herself by falling on her knees, and grasping it tightly ; but in doing so pussy slipped from her arms, and fell with a loud splash into the cold dark water beneath. The child shrieked wildly with mingled grief and terror ; and with a wild resolve to save her pet or perish in the attempt, she too dropped into the rapid ice-cold water. It only rose to her waist ; but the current whirled her round, and only that with the instinct of self-preservation she clung to the frail bridge, she too would have been swept away in a moment. With plaintive cries, and one hand outstretched, she sought in vain for her favourite, and called it piteously again and again ; but there was no sound in answer. The fight with the current was exhausting ; her limbs were growing benumbed, and with piercing cries of fear and despair, by the help of the plank she drew herself towards the bank, and threw herself, gasping and breathless, on the grass.

“ Her little soft, black pussy, her only friend, was gone ; she was now utterly alone.

“ Poor little friendless one ! her sobs and tears were heard above that cold grey sky that peeped through the swaying foliage above her head, and help was near.

“ A young lady, who lived in a large white house on the borders of the wood, was returning for her sketching materials, forgotten by the rivulet that afternoon. Hearing Nanny’s screams, she rushed to the spot, and bending over the child, enquired kindly how she came there, and what made her cry ?

“ The child sobbed violently.

“ ‘ You have fallen into the water,’ said the lady, taking one of her little cold wet hands in hers.

“ ‘ Oh, my kitty, my own, *own* kitty !’ moaned the little creature in a paroxysm of grief. ‘ I wish I was dead too, that I do. Oh, my pussy !’

“‘Hush, my child; don't cry so. How wet you are. Get up and come with me. Where do you live?’

“Nanny yielded to the gentle tones, rose to her feet, and raising her tear-dimmed eyes, perceived the young lady in her white evening dress, and her scarlet cloak thrown over her head and shoulders. Her sweet compassionate face encouraged the child; she shook back her wet, clinging hair, and looked pitifully down on her saturated dress.

“‘Where do you live?’ repeated the lady.

“‘I don't live nowhere,’ said Nanny drearily.

“‘I haven't got no friend in all the world now. I've lost my kitty in the river. Oh, my pretty dearie, come back to me!’

“She threw her thin arm imploringly towards the stream, and again burst into tears.

“‘Poor child, poor little thing, come with me!’

“‘No, no; don't take me away; p'r'aps kitty might get out, and cry for me; she knowed me so well, she did. Let me stay here, lady.’

“‘If you remain here, wet and cold as you are, you may be ill, my child; if your poor pussy fell in, I fear the current is so strong, she could not get out again. Where did you come from? This way; you want some supper, don't you? I am going to bring you to an old friend of mine, who will take care of you for to-night.’

“Faint and exhausted, Nanny allowed herself to be led away to a pretty little cottage in the depth of the wood. The lady knocked at the door. It was opened by a trim, rosy-cheeked woman, very old, and much bent, who expressed great astonishment at her visitor.

“‘Miss Adelaide! At this time of night, out in your evening dress! What's the matter, my dear? Come in, come in, and give yourself a warm at the fire.’

“‘I can't just now, nurse, it is almost dinner-time; but look what I have brought you. I want you to take care of this little one for to-night; she is cold, and hungry, and wet.’

"The old woman stared in surprise as the young lady drew the ragged child forward. There followed a short conversation aside in low tones, and then with a few kind words to Nanny, the lady ran homewards, the old woman following her down the path, and watching her till she entered the house.

"She drew Nanny into the little kitchen on her return, looked at her for a minute or two in silence, sighed, shook her head, then placed her comfortably in the chimney-corner, and presently gave her a large bowl of hot bread and milk. The faint colour returned to Nanny's face as she ate in silence, grieving inwardly at the remembrance that she had now no pussy with whom to share it, but too much exhausted to shed another tear. A few moments afterwards, her head sank on the settle, and she fell fast asleep.

"Morning found her languid and weary, pains and stiffness in all her limbs, her tears ready to spring forth at the slightest notice. The kindly old woman stroked her thin hands, and gave her a good breakfast; but she could not eat; so, with another grave shake of the head, the old nurse proceeded to give her a warm bath, and put her back again into the little bed made up for her near the fire. Nanny felt much more comfortable; her rough hair was brushed smooth and neat, and her large sorrowful eyes brightened into a look of pleasure as the young lady entered the cottage; and having greeted the old woman, advanced to her bedside, and enquired how she felt.

"Nanny looked up wistfully. 'Please, lady,' she whispered, 'did any one find my pussy?'

Mis Adelaide sat down by her, and took her hand. 'My poor little girl, yes; your kitten was found some way down the stream.'

"'Oh, let me see her!'" cried Nanny, starting up; but the lady stopped her.

"'Lie down, poor child. Pussy was quite drowned. There, there, do not cry so bitterly.'

“ ‘My kitty!’ sobbed the desolate child; ‘my own, only kitty! the only friend as I had got! Oh, kitty, kitty, I ha’n’t got none to love me now!’ ”

“ Miss Adelaide soothed her with untiring gentleness. The soft tender tones of Christian love and sympathy were a new sound to poor Nanny’s ears, and gradually her sobs grew less violent. When they ceased, and the hot tears were wiped from the thin white cheeks, this fair soldier of the cross began her Lord’s work, and gave His loving message to the lonely little wayfarer whom He had brought across her path. She told the wondering child of His life and death on earth, and the cause of the great sacrifice.

“ Nanny lay listening with a longing, hungering heart.

“ ‘Did you never before hear of Jesus Christ our Lord, who came to seek and to save that which was lost? Don’t you know, little one, that it was He who sent me to find you by the rivulet?’ ”

“ ‘Did He?’ asked Nanny in surprise; then laying her little hand on the lady’s, she added gratefully, ‘If you hadn’t found me, I’d have died.’ ”

“ ‘Well, little one, if Jesus Christ had not come down to find us, in His great love for sinners, we must all have died an everlasting death.’ ”

“ Nanny nodded gravely.

“ ‘I have heard about hell and heaven; they’s the places people go to when they’s put in the ground. My aunt won’t never go to heaven; she treated me and kitty shameful.’ And throwing up her sleeve, she pointed to the bruises on her arm.

“ ‘Adelaide’s face grew sad and pitying.

“ ‘What is your name?’ she enquired.

“ ‘Nanny.’ ”

“ ‘Nanny who?’ ”

“ ‘Just Nanny, and no more.’ ”

“ ‘Little Nanny, when they cruelly treated our great Lord, of whom I have just told you, and crowned Him with sharp thorns, do you think He was angry?’ ”

"Nanny nodded assent.

"'Oh, no. He said, "Father, forgive them." He loved even *them*, His murderers; and He loves you dearly, little child. He is your greatest and best Friend.'

"'My Friend?' said Nanny, with grave deliberation. 'There aint nobody ever *my* friend, 'cept pussy. My aunt couldn't abear me, she said, as I were always in her way. And there were cousin Tom; he said as, if I wasn't there, he'd have more to eat, and as I was a little beggar as hadn't any call to anything. And they did nothing 'cept beat me and knock me about, and locked me up when there wasn't nothing to eat in the house; so kitty and me, we plans together to get out o' the winder, and go off, no matter where. Ah, lady, I believe as the Friend you speaks of wouldn't even look at me. Nobody ever cared for Nanny, 'cept pussy, my own little dearie kit.'

"Adelaide rose, and took down a large Bible from the dresser.

"'Listen, Nanny; your Saviour has a message for you, written in this book.'

"'For me?'

"'Yes, my child. You say you are friendless, and this is the message Jesus has sent to the friendless;' and as she read the blessed words of power and comfort, the little sorrowing face beside her cleared and brightened, the contracted brow relaxed, and the dark eyes were fixed in eager attention.

"'I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you;' 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends;' 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you;' 'This is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment.'

"Nanny listened in perfect silence, while the old woman, who stood near, murmured—'Blessed be God, there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother!'

"A sweet peaceful smile stole over the child's face.

"'Lady,' she whispered; 'you are very good to me. I'd like

to know the good Friend as writes such messages to me. I can't quite *feel* as He really cares for the like o' me, it seems too good to be true ; but you'll tell me again, lady dear, as He'll be my Friend, and won't I love Him ! Oh, won't I just ! 'Twill be something new, so beautiful and happy, to have a friend.'

"Her voice failed ; for she was weak and weary ; and overcome by drowsiness, her eyes closed, and she slept, still holding the hand of the lady.

"'Poor little tired pilgrim !' said Adelaide softly, 'your great Captain has, I trust, sought and found you.'

"Little more remains to be told. The friendless one had found an earthly and, more than all, a heavenly Friend. The lady, having heard from her her aunt's address, drove over and obtained instant and ready permission to keep the child. The first glance at the loud-voiced, coarse-faced woman, and wretched hovel, convinced the lady of the truth of Nanny's tale. Having performed this disagreeable duty, she returned home to bring the good tidings to the anxious child.

"Nanny's health had been much impaired by the hardships she had undergone for so many years, and for many days she was confined to bed, during which season of quiet she learned much from the lips of Adelaide of her Almighty Friend.

"When she regained her strength, she continued to live with the old woman, to whom she became fondly attached ; but passed most of her time at the white house on the confines of the wood, where she was trained as a servant, while her evenings and quiet Sundays were spent in learning the way of life and happiness and peace from her first and much-loved teacher."





CHAPTER VIII.

LITTLE OFFERINGS.

Giant Gain and Dwarf Grudge.

THE next day was Sunday. The young Stanton's attended the pretty village church, accompanied by their grand-aunt and stepmother. During the service they all looked very demure and proper, till the plate was handed round, when Augustus nudged Ada to look at Tom, who immediately perceived it, and flushed angrily. None of the children contributed anything for the poor; and when they returned from church, Mrs. Stanton said: "I hope to drive to Pope's Hollow tomorrow, children, when you all come back from school;" then taking off a silver-mounted black velvet bag that she generally wore hanging from her waistband, she laid it on a little table, adding, "Would it not be a good plan to take them some of the things they need so much; I think we should all feel much happier, if by a little self-denial we could give them a few little comforts and necessaries when we go. I shall leave this here, in case any of you wish to contribute." So saying, she left the room, and the children glanced at each other in surprise and consternation.

"I am not going to reward that little rogue for stealing my half-crown," said Augustus.

"We have no proof that he stole it," said Katie gravely.

"I know it without proof. Where else could a starving little beggar like that get it?"

"I have some sugar-plums upstairs," said Alfred sorrowfully, "that I could not finish yesterday; I wish I could turn them into money again, and give it to that poor little girl who held the pony."

"I have a whole shilling," said Katie, drawing it slowly out of her pocket.

"I have spent all mine, except ninepence," said Alfred eagerly; "I wonder if that would be too little to give?"

"The poor widow in the Bible gave only two mites," said Katie meditatively.

"Yes," said Alfred reverently, as he dropped the pennies, one by one, into the bag; "and Jesus knew she had not any more to give."

Katie looked earnestly at him for a moment, then slipped her shilling quietly into the bag.

"I have only three halfpence left," said Augustus. "I would give it in a moment, only it is not worth while."

"Oh, yes it is!" said Ada; "and I will give a penny. Mamma is gone. She will never know how much each of us put in."

"The great Prince of Peace will know," said Alfred.

"Hold your tongue," retorted Augustus rudely, as he dropped the three halfpennies into the bag, and held it open for Ada's slowly-produced penny. "Now, young champion, what do you mean to put in?" This was addressed to Tom, who took up a book, pretending not to hear.

"Now comes the tug of war!" said Augustus, laughing. "Now we shall have a proof as to whether Tom is becoming a real soldier or not."

It became impossible to feign inattention any longer. Tom looked up; his determination was taken. He drew a bright half-crown from his pocket, and put it resolutely into the bag.

"Bravo!" cried Augustus, clapping his hands as his step-mother came back. "Only think, mamma, Tom put in a whole half-crown!"

She smiled at Tom, and took her seat on the sofa.

"Why, you don't praise him a bit," cried Ada. "If you knew what a miser he is, mamma, you would be so surprised."

"I trust and believe Tom did not give it for *my* poor praise."

"I put in my whole shilling," said Katie proudly.

"They all saw me put in my ninepence," said little Alfred, with a self-satisfied smile.

"Some One else saw Alfie too," she answered gravely; "and saw whether it was simply for his dear Master's sake, or only for the praise of men, that he presented his little offering."

"Look at Tom's face," exclaimed Augustus; "he is repenting of his generosity already."

Tom, who had been looking dubiously at the bag, hastily turned his eyes another way.

"Do you wish for another story, children?"

"Oh, yes!" they cried in chorus.

"Then I shall tell you one, called

Giant Gain and Dwarf Grudge.

"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?
or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"—MATT. xvi. 26.

"What little boy does not remember the first time he had money to spend of his 'very own'? Perhaps it was only a penny, or a little silver threepence; perhaps a bright new sixpence, or even a whole shilling. Whatever it may have been, I have no doubt he recollects the wonderful plans he made about spending it; great speculations as to what and how much this mighty sum would purchase, and on which of his many needs and desires it would be best expended. Some, perhaps, would think only of gratifying themselves, some consult the wishes and tastes of their friends, and a few might remember those who were poor, or in want, or in distress, and, denying themselves, try how far the little coin, by prudence and economy, could be made to go towards helping them, and alleviating their wants. But if half of the little possessor's anticipations were

realized, what a wonderful piece of silver or copper it would prove itself, and what a lucky little fellow he would imagine himself to be!

“But we must not leave out one more source of pleasure that is, the thought of the love that had prompted the donor of the much-prized gift; perhaps a father’s kindness, or a token of a mother’s approval; or it may have been his own thriftiness that earned it from a neighbour. Whichever it was, the thought would certainly add tenfold to the gratification of spending it. Ah, but this had no place in little Godfrey Greshem’s mind, the little boy I am going to tell you about. He could look back with no feeling of pleasure to the way he had come by the bright new shilling now firmly clasped in the palm of his right hand, while he peered into every shop window he passed, as he walked through the town, unable to decide what purchase to make with it, planning and scheming all the time how to make the most of it, and trying to banish from his mind the manner in which it had been gained.

“It happened that two boys had quarrelled that morning in the playground of his school, and were beginning to fight, when Godfrey’s quick eye caught a glimpse of the head-master’s hat above the hedge at the far side of the field. No one else had seen it.

“‘You will be caught in less than five minutes,’ he said, in a warning tone.

“‘What do you bet. asked a big, red-faced boy, who had been expelled for bad conduct from his last school, and had begun to instruct his new school-fellows in many wicked practices.

“‘A shilling!’ said Godfrey quickly.

“‘Done,’ returned his companion, pleased and surprised at having him for a pupil.

“Godfrey was scarcely less astonished at himself, but far from feeling pleased. He had hitherto made a stand against this boy and his admirers, and had sided entirely with the

better and steadier fellows; but this was a great step in the wrong direction, and he felt the more vexed when he saw his defection elated his tempter. Once or twice he had it almost on his lips to say he had seen his master coming; but the hope of gaining the shilling deterred him. The struggle was still going on in his mind, and he had come to no decision, when the master suddenly appeared on the scene. The combatants were sent in for punishment, and the rest dispersed, Godfrey pursuing his debtor down the road, and with some difficulty extorting the shilling so unjustly obtained. Probably he would never have succeeded in getting it, had not his bad companion hoped that some such encouragement would win his alliance on future occasions; for none knew Godfrey's weak point better than he.

"And now, how to spend this ill-gotten money is perplexing him as he goes through the streets. Ah, here is a confectioner! the very place to lay it out to advantage for himself alone! He went in, and emerged in five minutes minus sixpence, and plus a bag of choice delicacies. He stopped for one moment at the door to open it, and take out a square puff of pastry and jam, and as he raised it to his lips, became aware of a hungry pair of dark eyes that watched him eagerly; a little dirty hand was stretched out, and a wistful voice said, 'Please.'

"Godfrey turned hastily from the ragged child, and walked away, eating as he went.

"A greengrocer's shop next attracted his attention, and with his other sixpence he added a bag of ripe fruit to his first purchase. How excellent it was! The confectionary and fruit combined certainly made the most delicious luncheon.

"'I wonder how Fred Heron is to-day?' he said to himself, stopping to look up at a small house by the roadside. The blind in one of the upper windows was lowered; it was probably in that very room the schoolfellow lay, who had had his leg broken at football last week.

"'I might call and enquire for him,' he thought. 'If old

Mr. Heron is at home, 'twill be jolly ; he is such an old friend of father's, he is certain to tip me. But no ; Fred would see these things—I'd have to give——' He looked round, was there anywhere he could hide them while he went in ? Not a spot, so picking out a ripe pear, he bit a large piece out of the rosy side, and continued his way homewards.

"Was there no lingering thought hidden far, far away in his heart, of how wholesome and refreshing the cool fruit would have been to the parched lips of the young sufferer, lying a prisoner within those closely-drawn curtains ? If the little voice made itself heard, Godfrey stifled and banished it instantly, for it interfered with the perfect enjoyment of his good things.

"As he entered the little garden gate of his own home, there was more than half a sponge-cake left, and having by this time eaten rather more than enough, and far more than was good for him, he threw it to Carlo, the big retriever, who rushed out to greet him, barking, and wagging his tail with delight.

"Perhaps a thought of the little hungry face and outstretched hand at the confectioner's door crossed his mind, as the great animal snapped it up at one mouthful ; but he chased away the reproachful remembrance and entered the house.

"I am afraid by this time you are saying to yourself, 'Surely this is not a soldier of the cross ;' but you must remember that it is 'by little and little' our Captain drives out our foes, and it is by the bitter experience of many humbling falls that we learn our dependence on Him for grace and strength. It takes often many years of hard strife to root out besetting sins, and those that most impeded Godfrey's path heavenwards were money-love and selfishness.

"The bright girdle of truth had unclasped a little at school that morning, and fallen loosely round him. Money-love then hastened to supply its place with a little chain of its own forging, and the young warrior's weapons being sheathed, and his face turned from his Captain, he had fallen an easy prey to the snares and pitfalls his watchful foes had set around him.

"The remembrance of the great warfare in which he was engaged occurred to him, however, as he went to rest that night. He knelt to pray, and strove to raise his eyes to his great Commander; but the mists his enemies had caused to arise dimmed his sight, and he fell asleep with a very heavy heart.

"He dreamt he was wandering over a wild and rugged moor, and came at length to a gate under a high arch, on which was printed in great letters of gold—

"'GIANT GAIN'S TERRITORY.'

"'LABOURERS WANTED.'

After a moment's hesitation he slowly advanced towards it, and pushing the great portal open, timidly entered. There stood the mighty giant straight before him—a huge powerful-looking fellow of such stupendous height that Godfrey's neck ached as he endeavoured to look up in his face.

"He was very well dressed—quite a fashionable-looking creature. A Highland plaid made him a slight and graceful cravat; a jewelled dagger fastened it in front, where ordinary mortals wear an ornamental pin. His head was adorned with a gay drugget, becomingly twisted into a turban. He wore blue spectacles, with glasses about the size of the lid of a tea-kettle, joined together with an iron horse-shoe, which fitted nicely over his hooked nose; and a young fir-tree served him for a walking-cane. Altogether he looked quite gentleman-like, and Godfrey stood for a whole minute staring at him in open-mouthed admiring wonder.

"But the size and number of his pockets were perhaps the most remarkable things about him; for there was not a seam in his tremendous dark-green coat and waistcoat that did not contain at least half a dozen of them. This tall creature smiled benevolently at his look of astonishment, and said pleasantly, 'My little fellow, I know you well; and though you may not have seen me face to face before, I assure you that you have

had one or two dealings with me, and I should not be at all surprised if you wished to enter my service.'

"Godfrey wondered what these dealings could have been. However, as he had rather a curiosity to know what the giant's service was like, he signified his readiness to enter upon it.

"'There are just one or two conditions I must make with you,' said the giant, looking well-pleased. If you give yourself to my service, you must devote yourself to it, and to nothing else. There are some neighbours of mine—Honest-earnings and Faithful-toil—with whom I have nothing to do; their labourers do not work wholly and entirely for what they can gain by it, but look chiefly for another reward to be given them hereafter. Now, you must say to yourself, 'I am working for Gain, and for no one else;' and avoid these against whom I now warn you. You will know them at once by their armour, which they wear, even when at work, to defend them from the attacks of many foes, who, like myself, assault them whenever they find opportunity; for they are full of scruples about working on the seventh day, obtaining gold and silver by unfair means, and such like, and furthermore, refuse to have anything to do with my little friend Grudge, to whom I must introduce you; but first you will like to see your future field of labour, and your fellow-workers. Stand on my hand.'

"He lowered the great member nearly to the ground for his convenience, and Godfrey, reluctant to comply, but afraid to refuse, gave a little jump into the air, and alighted safely on the giant's palm, which held both his feet comfortably; he then felt himself raised to a marvellous height, and the giant's voice (which sounded very loud, now that he was so near his head) said, 'Look yonder, over the moorland, and you will see, scattered about the plain, many of my servants at work.'

"Godfrey did as he was desired, and perceived a number of men and women, and some little boys and girls, groping busily among the long grass and reeds, as if diligently seeking for something. Here and there amongst them was one clad in a

complete suit of shining armour; and though these last seemed as busy as the rest, yet Godfrey observed that, instead of keeping their eyes continually fixed on the ground, they were ever glancing upward, and the visors of their bright helmets were all turned in one direction, towards a hill covered with golden clouds in the distance.

“‘These are they with whom you must have nothing to do,’ said the giant, observing his look of astonishment; ‘they work for a Prince who dwells on that hill yonder, and are at present under the superintendence of Hard-earnings and Faithful-toil. Now, it only remains for you to say whether you choose my service or not.’

“Godfrey did not quite like to be bound by conditions; but as there was evidently much pleasure and excitement amongst Gain’s labourers, from the intense earnestness and zeal with which they sought, he again expressed himself willing to accept it.

“The great giant gently lowered him on earth again.

“‘So they ever find it dull to toil so hard?’ he asked, delighted to feel the firm ground beneath his feet again.

“The giant took out a handkerchief about the size of a tablecloth, and blew his nose with a sound like thunder.

“‘The gain far outweighs all trouble,’ he said gravely.

“‘What are they looking for?’

“‘They seek a treasure that is supposed to be hidden somewhere about here.’

“‘But now and then they seem to find.’

“‘Aye, the land is full of pieces of gold and silver, which they pick up continually.’

“Godfrey liked to hear that.

“‘What is the treasure?’ he asked.

“‘It is a rare sparkling jewel called *Happiness*. Those armed fellows say it is only to be found on yonder hill; but I maintain it is somewhere within my territory; but now to work, my boy, we are wasting time.’

"They set off down the hill to the fields below. It was a thorny, steep descent. The giant walked down with ease, pushing the long grass and rushes about with his feet, now and then stooping to pick up something, and slipping it carelessly into one of his many pockets with a discontented air. Godfrey had to run with all his might to keep up with his huge strides. His clothes caught in the brambles as he rushed along. At one time the sleeve of his right arm was torn from the wrist to the elbow, and his hand badly scratched.

"The giant perceived the accident in a moment.

" 'I am hurrying you too much ; allow me to offer you a pin,' he said politely, producing a new steel skewer.

"Godfrey gratefully thanked him, but meekly suggested it was *rather* large, and the giant good-humouredly replaced it in the lining of his coat.

" 'Ah me !' said a deep growling voice close by.

" 'Here's another I am glad to see !'

"Godfrey turned hastily, and perceived a hideous little dwarf standing close beside him.

"He recoiled a little ; the creature looked so very repulsive, and laughed so coarsely and loudly.

" 'Ah, young sir,' he said, 'you don't seem to care for me now ; but you will like me better by-and-by, I dare say. I improve on acquaintance ; don't I, Gain ?'

"The giant nodded his great head till Godfrey was half afraid it would drop off.

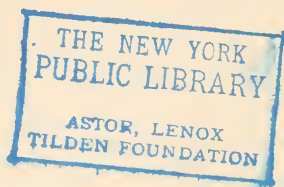
" 'Aye,' he said gravely, 'you were no friend of mine at first, Grudge ; but I own I like you better and better every day.'

"Grudge grinned from ear to ear. How excessively ugly he looked ! his big red face and narrow forehead, that receded till it was lost altogether beneath his matted grey hair ; the twinkling eyes, set close together ; and great bony hands, that grasped and clutched a huge sack he carried on his back, as if his life depended on its safety.

"What a contrast the horrid little creature presented to the



"GIANT GAIN AND DWARF GRUDGE."



lofty being at his side ! He looked just large enough to fit nicely into his watch-pocket. This last reflection made Godfrey turn to the giant again ; but, oh, how different he looked since Grudge had appeared ! His fine pleasant countenance had undergone a complete change ; discontent and ill-humour darkened his eyes ; his great brows were drawn together with a heavy frown ; hard, stern lines were round his mouth ; and his lips moved as if making some difficult calculation.

“ ‘I say,’ exclaimed Grudge, winking cunningly at Godfrey, ‘gold and silver get heavy to carry after a bit, and you will see you will be giving away half your gains, and wasting them, unless you give them to me to keep for you.’ ”

“ ‘Is he to be trusted ?’ enquired Godfrey of the giant.

“ ‘Aye, indeed ; there’s no one keeps it safer than Grudge. I’ve handed all mine over to him, and find he’ll not only prevent me giving any away, but hates me even to spend it on myself. But to your work, my little fellow, or you will have nothing for him to keep.’ ”

“ Godfrey hastened to obey, and joined the crowd in their toil.

“ His new companions were grave and dull, and seemed to be entirely engrossed in the one idea of finding wealth, till they absolutely could think or speak of nothing else ; so that, except for a word of kindness that he received when one of the armed strangers came in his way, he had nothing to cheer him or lighten his labour.

“ Strange to say, he found the work deeply interesting. The hope of finding the priceless treasure was ever in his mind, and every day he grew more and more absorbedly devoted to his work. He was soon, like the rest of his companions, able to think of or care for nothing else, and very soon began to entertain some little affection for Grudge ; and it was remarked that the fonder he became of that hideous little dwarf, the colder and more disagreeable his manners were to the rest of the world. Everything he found he threw over to the dwarf, who slipped it quietly into his great bag, and grew more sharp and eager

than ever as he perceived his influence over Godfrey becoming stronger and stronger.

“Once or twice they had a little quarrel. On the first occasion Godfrey conquered, he was so much the taller of the two; but on the next Grudge had the best of it, for he was by far the strongest. The cause of their disputes was, Godfrey expressing a wish to Grudge to have back a few pieces of silver to distribute amongst his companions; for at one time a fellow-seeker lost all he had gathered, and was quite destitute. At another, one of the armed pilgrims fell ill, and needed help; and again a little child came to him, faint with cold and hunger. To supply all these Godfrey had applied each time to Grudge; but after their first fight found it impossible to persuade the little creature to yield up a farthing of what he carried.

“One day an armed stranger, an old man, who loitered somewhat as he passed, drew near to Godfrey, who, looking up from his work, all flushed and heated by his efforts, laughed at the aged pilgrim for expecting to enrich himself with much gain while ever keeping his gaze upward towards the hill. But he shook his hoary head, and said gravely, ‘Little boy, join not thy young voice with the tempter’s. The sight of these gold-seekers tempts me much; but gold is heavy, and I am commanded to lay aside *every* weight, and to run with patience the race set before me, looking to my Master who is gone before, and waits to welcome me. Beware, child, how you load yourself with this wealth; for by-and-by you must cross yonder river, and the tide is deep and strong.’

“Godfrey looked for the first time at the turbid stream he pointed out, and as he did so a white-robed figure beckoned his aged companion and himself to follow whither he went. He led them down to the banks of the stream, and motioned them to swim across. The old man went first, and Godfrey wondered to see with what firm, bold strokes he swam across, till he perceived someone on the opposite shore was holding out a staff to which he clung, and thus was safely drawn across.

"As he lingered on the brink, Grudge tapped him on the shoulder.

"'Here are all your gains,' he said, tying a huge sack round his neck.

"'Can't you keep them!' exclaimed Godfrey, in sore distress; 'they will weigh me down! I shall be lost!'

"Not I; I've had enough of them. Giant Gain told you I should keep them safe for you; and now, there is every penny.'

"How hateful he looked as he said this, winking and leering at him with his little cunning eyes.

"'Oh that I had given more away!' cried Godfrey in despair.

"'If you wanted to be generous, you shouldn't have given them to me to keep.'

"Godfrey said no more. He entered the dark current; and as he did so, a voice was wafted from the opposite shore, 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

"The great sack weighed him down, the black waters surged above his head, and gurgled noisily in his ears; he struggled violently, and with a loud cry awoke!

"What a relief to find it all a dream! He rose, still trembling from the effects of his terror, thankful that there was still time to repent. The memory of his sin was now doubly hateful to him. He knelt by his bedside, and craved forgiveness of his great Master in heaven, and prayed to be washed clean in His precious blood; and then, it being still early, he went to tell the whole occurrence to his schoolfellow. With burning cheeks and downcast eyes, he confessed having seen the Master's approach. The boy looked much astonished, and not a little disappointed. However, he could not but admire the honesty and candour that now confessed it all, and refused Godfrey's expressed intention of repaying the shilling when it should be in his power to do so.

"The remembrance of his extraordinary dream dwelt long in his mind, and a growing distrust of his own resolutions led him

to depend more and more on the strength and power that could only be obtained from above, and through which alone he could successfully resist his besetting sin. His father allowed him twopence a week for good conduct at school. What self-denial that one sin involved—to gather this little sum till the debt was paid! But Godfrey kept his word faithfully, and for six long weeks never spent one penny till he was able, nearly two months afterwards, to repay the debt."





CHAPTER IX.

OVERCOME OF EVIL.

Heavy-laden.

THAT night, when every one had retired to rest, a crouching figure stole noiselessly out of the long corridor that led to the boys' rooms, and crept down the creaking staircase, across the dark hall to the drawing-room.

Here a faint gleam of light from the few red cinders that still smouldered in the grate made the pale features of Tom Stanton but just discernible, as he knelt on the rug, with a piece of paper in his hand, and by blowing upon the fast-dying embers, caused them to glow afresh. After some time and trouble he succeeded in making the paper catch fire, and lit one of the wax tapers on the mantelpiece. He was half-dressed, deadly pale, and his teeth chattered together, more from fear than cold. With many apprehensive glances around, he bent his head, and listened intently; then, in the solemn silence of the night, he slowly advanced towards the black velvet bag, which still lay where they had left it on the table the evening before. He opened it with trembling fingers: how loudly in the great stillness the coins clinked together as he thrust in his hand and drew out two glittering shillings.

"It is not robbery," he whispered to himself, with quivering lips; "for it is my own, my very own, to do what I like with."

"It *was* your own," said conscience reprovingly; but he would not listen to it.

"She said we might give what we chose," he pondered; "and she urged us not to give it grudgingly, but cheerfully. I *can* give sixpence with all my heart, but not *half* papa's gift, that would be too much," and he repeated the last two words several times as he gazed half-regretfully at the two bright coins in his palm.

The hall clock struck three, and he started violently. What a deafening clamour those hoarse tones seem to make now, though almost unheard in the daytime! What if it should awake someone! In an agony of dread he extinguished the light, and with the money in his hand stole upstairs again.

How awfully quiet the house seemed, as if he alone were alive amid those closed silent doors. Could it be the breathless calm that is often felt before a storm? The remembrance of the last thunder and lightning was still very fresh in his memory, and obeying an irresistible impulse, he drew back the heavy crimson curtain of the lobby window and looked out. The sky was deep blue, the bright morning star twinkled coyly overhead, and just above the horizon a slender line of pale, pale amber marked the coming dawn. He gave a long-drawn sigh of relief, and turned away from the window to meet a sight that thrilled him with new terror, and almost took his breath away. This was nothing less than his little sister Katie, standing at the head of the stairs in her white nightdress, barefoot and bareheaded, with her long dark hair flowing in waving masses over her shoulders.

"Oh, Tom!" she gasped, feeling almost as much relieved as he was alarmed, "is it only you? I was so frightened when I heard someone moving about the house."

"You silly child," said Tom, recovering his presence of mind with a strong effort, "go to bed at once."

And lightly mounting the second flight, he took her little cold, shaking hand in his, and led her to her room.

"What did you want down stairs?" she asked, still holding him, when he tried to shake her off; for she was reluctant to be left alone again.

"Oh, I went for—for something I had left in the drawing-room last night."

"Did you find it in the dark?"

"Yes; I got it all right. Go to bed, Katie; good-night."

"Good-night," she answered slowly and wistfully; "I wish it was time to get up."

"It soon will be; the day is breaking. I was just looking at it, when you startled me on the stairs." He stopped short, hesitating whether to extract a promise from her not to betray him; but fearing that such a course might seem to give the matter importance, and so fasten it upon her memory, he preferred relying upon her natural reserve, should she happen to remember it; and earnestly hoping it would all be forgotten by the morning, he went to bed.

Tom Stanton's face was paler than usual when, some hours later, the whole party assembled at the breakfast-table; and notwithstanding all his efforts to look natural and at ease, both face and manner bore unmistakable signs of an unusual weight of anxiety and preoccupation.

Mrs. Stanton observed the change at once. "Tom, dear, do you feel quite well?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Mamma," said Ada, "Rolf comes to-day, does he not?"

"Yes; I hear he has arrived already; it is a long way for him to come. I was just now asking nurse about him. She says that, notwithstanding his loss of speech and hearing, he seems to be very intelligent, and obeys the gardener's signs, so that he has no trouble with him."

"New brooms sweep clean," said Augustus, with a foreboding shake of the head.

Mrs. Stanton just then became aware that, unconsciously to herself, her eyes had been directed continually to Tom's side of the table, and her ears had been keenly observant of every word that fell from his guarded lips.

She felt anxious and uncomfortable about the little soldier,

and could not reconcile what she saw with his resolves and conversation of a few days before. Was he again discouraged by the multitude or persistence of his enemies? She determined to discover the cause, and, if possible, to aid and encourage the weak little soldier by again reminding him of the only Source of help and support.

"Tom," she said, drawing him aside from the rest after breakfast, "you do not look happy."

"Don't I?" said Tom, with a cold, forced smile.

"No. Could I do anything to make you so, dear?"

The low, soft tones, the anxious glance, broke down the barrier of Tom's reserve. He leant his head against the back of his chair, and broke into a perfect storm of sobs.

"Hear the baby!" laughed Ada.

"Poor infant! it knows no better," said Augustus, with mock pity.

"Hush," said Mrs. Stanton; and the tone, quiet as it seemed, it was impossible to disobey.

She turned again to Tom with some sweet words of kindness and sympathy; but the others had drawn near, and he wept on without heeding her.

"I can't tell her," he was saying over and over again to himself. "I could never tell her—never! never! How she would turn from me, and almost hate me, if she only knew!"

"Don't cry so, dear," she gently said; "never mind now. We shall talk it over another time; perhaps it is not quite as bad as it looks."

Tom shook his head, as if to signify it was even far worse than she could imagine. But she soothed him till the bowed head was raised and the tear-stained cheeks rubbed dry.

"Well, that was an explosion!" said Augustus. "What will you do with your swollen eyes, baby? All the fellows will make game of you. It is just school-time."

"We have half an hour still," said Ada, glancing at the clock.

Tom got up, and went to look at his eyes in the glass.

"They will be just as usual again in half an hour," said Mrs. Stanton kindly.

"Unless we have another heavy shower in the meantime," said Ada, with a contemptuous glance at Tom's flushed cheeks and quivering lips.

"I know something that will make him feel all right," said little Alfred triumphantly.

"What is that, Alf?"

"Mamma, tell us a story."

"Do, mamma," pleaded Katie; "the next letter is H."

"Very willingly, dear child. The name of my story is

Heavy-laden.

"For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me to bear."—PSALM xxxviii. 4.

"It was a lovely evening in the beginning of June. The day had been intensely hot; but now the great sun was slowly going to his rest among the fleecy cloud-pillows in the western sky. The whole landscape was bathed in its last lingering beams, and the broad river glistened and sparkled as it rolled sluggishly along, streaked from bank to bank with amber rays, that danced and quivered as it flowed.

"Beside it, reclining at full length near the knotted trunk of an old lightning-scathed oak, was a little boy of poor but respectable appearance. A crutch lay beside him, and in the crown of his hat, turned brim uppermost upon the grass, lay a ripe peach, whose soft tints rivalled the river's reflection of the rosy sky. For a long time he lay without moving, till the burning sun sunk below the misty blue hills, and the bright fiery clouds were fading away, leaving an unbroken expanse of cloudless blue. Then he slowly and wearily raised his head, took his hands from his tear-stained face, and looked around.

"How beautiful everything was in the summer twilight! the deep blue river that rolled at his feet, the cloudless sky overhead, and the fragrant breezes that rustled softly through

the bending willows, and dipped their drooping boughs into the quiet water! How refreshingly it fanned his burning cheeks and swollen eyes! Then his gaze fell on the ripe fruit, half hidden in his hat beside him; and with a loud sob and violent shudder, the tearful face was hidden again, and the little frame shook and trembled in uncontrollable grief.

"It was a lonely spot—so lonely, it was not likely that any one would pass by and find the little mourner; so for several minutes he wept unrestrainedly.

"Then he ventured once more to raise his sorrowful face, but this time it was directed straight to the quiet sky, where pale twinkling stars were coming out one by one.

"‘I shall never see her again!’ he exclaimed, drawing himself stiffly into a sitting posture. ‘She said if I were good I should; but I am not. Oh, I’m not! Mother, mother, mother! why did you leave me? I am only growing worse, and—and ——’

"The cry ended in a stifled gasp; he was too weary even to weep, but remained motionless, sitting upright, his eyes still fixed on the golden specks that glittered above his head.

"The clock in the low square tower of the village church slowly tolled the hour of nine; he listened till the last deep tone had died away, then rose slowly with difficulty to his feet.

"‘The Bible-meeting must be quite over now.’ He sighed as he stooped, with an expression of pain on his pale face, to pick up his crutch. ‘Every one has gone home by this time; I’m glad I ran away; I could not have dared to go with them, and hear our minister speak about God—the great God *she* always loved so much; I’m not fit ever to go there again. I—a thief!’

"He trembled from head to foot, and again his eyes fell on the fruit that lay so temptingly near him.

"‘I was so thirsty, ’twas the heat made me take it,’ he whispered to himself with quivering lips. ‘God saw me thirsty. He was watching me when widow Nibblet left me her stall to care——’

“He raised his wistful eyes once more to the sky. ‘How angry He must be now! ’Twouldn’t be half so bad if I hadn’t given myself to Him, to be His little soldier and servant. Oh, how mother prayed with me! She did not know I was looking, but I saw her eyes closed, her hands clasped, her lips moving. Oh, mother, why did you go and leave your little lame Harry all alone in this wide, dreary world?’

“He stood looking upward for a moment, with clasped hands and streaming tears; then throwing the peach roughly out of his hat, he put it on, and turned hastily away.

“‘I shall never eat it!’ he exclaimed, with a shiver of disgust; ‘never! Oh, if that would undo my having taken it! but it won’t.’

“He hopped a few steps up the bank, then stopped short, and turned back.

“‘I shall put it back on widow Nibblet’s stall,’ he murmured to himself; ‘perhaps then the great God will forgive me, and let it be as if I never took it.’ Then, kneeling on the grass, he hid his face once more in his hands, and whispered softly, ‘Great God, who livest in heaven, forgive my dreadful sin, and take it quite away; for I am sorry. Make me good, O God; for I want to live in Thy beautiful home, where mother is, for ever.’

“Then picking up the peach, he once more limped off homewards. It required but little skill or trouble to replace the stolen fruit on Mrs. Nibblet’s stall at the corner of the village street; for the old woman was lying back under her large cotton umbrella fast asleep. Little Harry dropped it in great haste into its place in the round, flat basket, and went away as fast as his trusty crutch would carry him, wondering within himself whether, after this act of restitution, there would not be some chance of meeting hereafter the parent he so fondly loved and so deeply lamented.

“Poor little soldier, what a thorny by-way he had wandered into! how far from his good Captain, whose precious blood

had been shed to redeem him from the sins he so truly repented, and who was ready and willing to wash them all away ! Ah, it was all in vain that he strove to push his way single-handed against the hostile foes that rose in masses to obstruct his way heavenward. His bright armour was soiled and dusty, the lustre of his helmet was dimmed, his sharp sword sheathed, his buckler hanging loosely from his arm ; and all for lack of one glance of the faith that worketh by love raised to his crucified Lord, without which he could have but little chance against the crafty enemies that surrounded him on every side.

“He had hardly entered the cottage when the great Giant Falsehood discharged one of his poisoned darts, and wounded him sorely.

“‘Where were you, Harry?’ asked Lizzie Ross, the eldest daughter of a kind neighbour, who had come in to take care of his baby brother, and keep house for his father since his mother’s recent death. ‘Jack was looking for you everywhere.’

“‘At the meeting-house,’ he answered briefly.

“Why he prevaricated he could not have told, except perhaps he feared his brother Jack might another time trace him to his quiet resort by the river.

“Lizzie said no more ; she bustled about making tea ; but Harry thought of his want of truth with a keen pang of remorse, and slunk sulkily into a dark corner, feeling more miserable than ever.

“He watched baby—little innocent, motherless baby, fast asleep in his little cot, the dark, fringed eyelids resting on his soft warm cheeks, one dimpled arm thrown above his head—and longed to be as unconscious of sin and sorrow as it was. Poor babe, it did not seem to miss mother as he did. Then he remembered with a thrill of pain its sad wailing cry for many days after her death. At any rate, there was some hope of its meeting dear mother again in the golden city ; but for himself——

“Harry felt the burning tears smart his swollen eyelids, and

controlled himself with a strong effort, and turned his thoughts another way.

“How he hated to see Lizzie Ross filling his mother’s vacant place. Poor Harry turned his gaze on her, and mentally compared her plump, trim little person, round rosy face, and brisk movements, as she stepped heavily in and out of the little kitchen with a face of busy importance, to the tall pliant figure, smooth dark hair, and gentle brown eyes, he so fondly remembered, so passionately loved.

“How could Jack and Molly laugh so merrily on the threshold when home was an empty blank to him? He felt he could bear it no longer, and seized his crutch.

“‘What are you going to do?’ asked Lizzie rather sharply; for she had no patience for his continual sorrow.’

“‘Going out,’ he replied vaguely.

“‘You shan’t go now; it’s tea-time.

“This was not the way his mother had opposed his wishes when the maintenance of her gentle but judicious authority made it necessary, and he could not repress a half-choked sob.

“‘Come now, Harry, I won’t have you cry your eyes out for nothing.’

“Cry his eyes out, indeed! He felt them anxiously with his fingers, but though hot and dim they seemed tolerably safe within his eyelids, so he replied by an angry glance, and pushed by her to force his way out.

“Lizzie’s strong hand was on his shoulder, his crutch slipped on the brick floor, but she caught him, and saved the impending fall.

“With a cry of mingled pain and rage he regained his grasp of it, and breaking roughly away from her, limped out of the cottage. On he toiled, up the now deserted street, till breathless and exhausted he reached the quiet churchyard, and threw himself on his mother’s newly-made grave with a bitter groan of sorrow and remorse.

“He lay motionless, his face hidden in his hands, too tired and dejected even to cry.

“What! never, never to see mother again? The idea filled his mind with unspeakable anguish. He thought of the long life that might be before him, and, worse than all, of the endless vista of age after age throughout the great eternity without her presence. Again and again he pictured her to his mind—the low sweet-toned voice, the loving smile, the caressing hand, and above all, the tender, untiring patience that had borne with him, tended, and loved him.

“A rustling sound, a light footstep close by, roused him from his reverie. He started, and looked up. A little girl about his own age was kneeling by the old squire’s grave, on the other side of the gravel walk. A basket hung on her arm, and slowly and sadly she arranged the flowers it contained on the freshly-turned soil.

“Harry almost forgot his own sorrows for the moment, so interested was he in watching her. It was a new idea to him that any could mourn as he had mourned, much less the squire’s little lady, who lived in the big house on the hill, in the midst of a beautiful old park, and with everything around her that could make life enjoyable; yet her cheeks were pale as his, her expression as sad, her eyes as tearful.

“‘Ah, but there is a difference!’ thought Harry. ‘She is not wicked like me. She knows she’ll meet him in heaven by-and-by.’

“The remembrance of his woe made a little sob irrepressible. It was now the young lady’s turn to be startled. She looked round wonderingly, and her eyes fell on him.

“Instantly his head went down into the long grass; but it was too late for concealment. He heard her crossing the walk, and coming over to him.

“He could not tell why. Perhaps it was the thought that somebody else in this great desolate world felt lonely for some one God had taken away that brought all the tears back again, and made him sob anew.

He felt her stoop beside him, and heard the little, kind,

clear voice speaking soothing and pitying words; but he neither looked nor spoke, only cried on, as if his heart would break. At length a little black-gloved hand gently drew his fingers from his face, and a pair of wistful blue eyes looked sadly into his.

“‘Little boy,’ she said gravely, ‘why do you cry?’ Then glancing from the lowly grave beside them to the sculptured monument beyond the path, she added tremulously, ‘God has taken from both of us someone whom we love very, *very* dearly. Do you know why?’

“‘Whom we love very, *very* dearly.’ The words awoke an earnest response in Harry’s lonely heart. Here was someone who understood somewhat of his sorrow. He shook his head in reply to her question, and fixed his eager eyes on her gentle face.

“‘Because He wished us to be His children more even than we were, to live closer to Him, and love Him more entirely. He saw that we were so very happy with them that we began to forget we were strangers and pilgrims, soldiers of the cross of Christ, fighting our way through a foreign land, and were trying to make it our home.’

“‘Harry listened attentively. ‘There isn’t no home down here without mother,’ he said, turning away his head.

“‘No,’ said the young girl, her lips quivering, her own eyes filling with tears, ‘no home down here; but Jesus Christ our Saviour is gone to prepare a place for us, a beautiful home, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. The Bible tells us about it. There we shall meet those we love, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.’

“‘Ah, but you’re sure to go there!’ exclaimed Harry, the bright drops coursing each other down his cheeks; ‘but when—when there’s no hope ——’

“‘There is, there *must* be, hope. Have you not heard how Jesus Christ came down to this world to die for our sins, that He might open the door for us into His kingdom of glory?’

“‘Yes; mother’s there, and I was going too. Mother told me to pray to Him to make me His child, and if I was good I’d be sure to meet her there, and—and—but——’

“‘But what?’

“‘I wasn’t——’

“‘Was not good?’ enquired his new friend in surprise.

“‘Aye,’ said Harry, blushing crimson, and poking up the grass with the end of his crutch, ‘I was worse than before; so—so—I knew there was no chance.’

“‘No chance of what?’

“‘Of going there, of meeting mother up above.’

“The little girl gazed at him in wondering perplexity.

“‘But did you think you could ever make yourself good enough to go to heaven?’

“Harry looked hurt. ‘I haven’t such a fine chance as you,’ he said; ‘but I thought if I tried hard——’

“‘As *me*?’ she repeated. ‘Oh, you do not, *cannot* know how many, many wicked things I do! Nobody in the whole world is good enough by themselves to go to heaven; that’s the reason Jesus came down to earth to live among us, and be crucified for us. He knew we *couldn’t* be good, even if we tried ever so hard; so, because He loved us, and would not have us perish, He died for our sakes, and bore all the weight of our great, great sins, to make us His own for ever. Think of that, little boy. If you are sorry for all the wrong things you have done, go to Him, and tell Him all about it. He will wash them all away in His most precious blood, and make you clean and pure, and guide you to His home far above the sky.’

“Harry gazed at her in silence, the news seemed almost too good to be true. ‘Are you quite sure?’ he asked. ‘Did He mean *me* too?’

“‘Yes.’ He says, ‘Come unto me, *all* ye that labour, and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ There was silence for a time; then she gently proposed to kneel down, and come both together to their loving Saviour; and the two little orphans,

heavy-laden with their sorrow, knelt side by side in that quiet, secluded spot.

“And when a short time afterwards they parted at the iron gate, and went to their respective homes, the child of riches was comforted by having done something for her Lord, and the little heir of poverty consoled by the first gleam of a new hope and love, that soon brightened into perfect day beneath the influence of his Saviour’s love.”





CHAPTER X.

TOM STANTON'S SECRET.

Just this Once.

“PLEASE, Master Augustus,” said Grimes, appearing just then at the door, “a little girl from Pope’s Hollow wants to see you for a moment.”

“To see *me*?”

“Yes, sir; she says the ‘biggest young gent.’”

“What is her name?”

“Jessie Leonard, sir.”

Augustus rose to go to her.

“Perhaps it is something about the half-crown,” suggested Ada.

“If it is I shan’t go,” said Augustus, returning to his chair. “Tell her to send in her message, Grimes.”

The servant went away, and Augustus looked defiantly at his stepmother. She had taken up her work, and did not raise her head.

“Is it Rolf’s sister, mamma?” asked Alfred.

“I suppose so. I think Mr. Hewitt said their name was Leonard.”

“Please, sir,” said Grimes, reappearing, “she says the little deaf and dumb boy is her brother, and he asked her to explain to you that some one in Oxondown gave him the money you thought was yours.”

"Oxondown is a large village," said Ada incredulously. "Did she say who gave it to him?"

"No, miss."

"Well, ask her," said Augustus. "What a trumped-up story it is!" he continued, when the man left the room. "There is no one in the village who would be likely to give him so much."

"It all comes of taking Rolf into the house," said Ada, with a glance towards her stepmother's grave, quiet face."

"The girl doesn't seem to know who gave it to him, sir," said Grimes, returning. "The little fellow is talking to her on his fingers; but she don't seem able quite to make him out."

"Then what does she interfere about it for? Send her away, Grimes. I am going right off to school this moment, and can't stay to see anybody."

"If she would wait a few minutes, I will see her," said Mrs. Stanton, speaking for the first time.

"She'll be glad enough to wait, ma'am," said Grimes, as he went away.

"I suppose you are going to believe every word she says!" cried Augustus angrily.

She raised her grave, reproachful eyes to his face. "I shall try to find out the truth," she said gently.

"Won't you give her that bag of money we collected last night, mamma?" said Ada.

"No; you must give it yourselves; but not for a day or two, for we must first try to find out whether that half-crown was her brother's; if so, of course it is owed to him, and must be paid."

"I can't pay it," said Augustus moodily; "I have not a penny in my possession."

"Pay it out of the ——," began Katie. "Don't, Tom;" for the moment she opened her lips he coloured, and pinched her arm.

"What is he doing to you?" asked Ada.

Katie met Tom's glance of despairing entreaty, and made no reply.

Mrs. Stanton looked anxiously from one to the other.

"We must not pay it out of our little collection," she said at length; "for that is a freewill-offering from you all. I think we must institute a search for the money Augustus lost, as he was not out of doors; it is sure to be found."

"I don't at all see why I should be the loser," said Augustus ruefully.

"You are at no loss," she answered gravely, "for you spent Rolf's money instead of your own; that is why I begged of you to keep it safely till we made some enquiries."

"We have no proof yet that it really belongs to Rolf," said Ada.

"No," she answered, smiling; "and till we have, it is useless to discuss it. I must go and speak to the little girl."

She left the room as she spoke, and the children hurried off to school.

Soon after the old clock in the market-place at Oxondown struck twelve, Ada and Katie were returning slowly homewards, when they met their brothers in the street.

"I say," cried Augustus, "here's a go! Mamma passed up ten minutes ago, as we came out of school, and, only think, Rolf was following at her heels."

"Did you ever know anyone so pertinacious about making enquiries!"

"Let's run after her, and ask her about it."

They all quickened their pace to a run, and, hot and breathless, overtook Mrs. Stanton and her little *protégé* at the entrance-gate.

Rolf slipped away when Augustus approached, and turning into a by-path, hurried off to the back of the house; Tom and Katie also slunk away by themselves; Alfred ran after a butterfly, and the other two joined their stepmother.

"Rolf is awfully funky of me," laughed Augustus. "Did

you see him making off? Well, mamma, what wonderful discoveries have you made?"

"I find it was at Dr. Burton's house Rolf got the half-crown. He led me there just now, and I called on the old gentleman, who told me the boy's story is perfectly true."

"Then what has become of mine?"

"I cannot imagine."

"It was quite safe in my pocket the evening before, and when Grimes brought up my coat next morning it was gone."

"It is very mysterious."

"What are you going to do about it now, mamma?" asked Ada.

"It is just possible it may have dropped out while the coat was being brushed, so I shall say no more about it till the place has been thoroughly searched."

"Are you going to Pope's Hollow to-day, mamma?"

"I had thought of doing so, but as the little boy and girl are both here, I shall put off our visit, and send nurse to the poor woman with a basket of food."

"I tell you what," exclaimed Augustus suddenly, "the fact is he spent Dr. Burton's money, and then stole mine."

"I cannot think so," said Mrs. Stanton, going towards the arbour, "he is so patient about the loss of it, and seems perfectly truthful."

Augustus shrugged his shoulders, drew Ada's hand through his arm, and walked off. While Mrs. Stanton raised the drooping boughs, two young voices engaged in audible conversation met her ear.

"Promise me you won't tell, Katie, just for this once," said Tom, in earnest expostulation.

"I don't want to promise, for there is nothing to tell," objected Katie.

"But when I ask you, you might do it, just this once."

Mrs. Stanton laid her hand lightly on Tom's head. He looked up hastily, and his eyes dilated with terror.

"I don't like to hear those last three words, Tom," she said, sitting down on the rustic seat, and drawing him towards her.

Tom hung his head.

"I have a little story," she continued, "about a little boy who was brought into great trouble and suffering by uttering them."

"What words?" asked Katie in surprise.

"Just this once."

"I should like to hear the story, mamma."

"Then run into the drawing-room; you will find the manuscript upon my writing-table."

She ran off, and Mrs. Stanton turned to her stepson.

"'Just—this—once' is a very insidious little enemy, Tom; don't let him delude you into doing what is wrong."

Tom would not raise his eyes.

"And if he *has* led you into sin, don't try to shield him by secrecy."

Poor little cowardly Tom! His armour hung very loosely; his face was obstinately turned from his Prince.

"I have not done wrong," he said doggedly.

"Are you sure one of Giant Falsehood's little emissaries had not a part in that answer, Tom?"

"I only took back what was my own," said Tom to himself; and submitting to Giant Temper's influence, he looked sullen, and would not answer a word.

Katie came back with the manuscript, followed by the others, who flocked in at the prospect of a story, and Mrs. Stanton began

Just this Once.

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right."—EPH. vi. 1.

"Now just fancy me, a boy, sitting down to write a diary! Not a demure, studious lad either, but a great, strong, noisy fellow, who is seldom quiet for two minutes together; at least, so mother says, and she ought to know; for I give her trouble

enough. Well, for this very reason, as I was fidgeting and moping about the house all day, she gave me a little book, with 'Diary for 1875' in gilt letters on the cover, and told me to scribble in the empty leaves to my heart's content.

"So as I write a pretty tolerable hand for a fellow of thirteen, and have read every book in the house except the dry ones, and moreover, as the doctor says I shan't be allowed out for another week, I may as well put pen to paper, and see what will come of it.

"What *do* people write in diaries? Some write grand descriptions, but that I could not do; others, all sorts of deep meditations, arguments, and essays, which is far beyond me; and some, I know, write their innermost thoughts about graver things; for I have read that book of Captain Hedley Vicers, and a very nice one it is; but I could never do that either, for fear any of the fellows should get hold of it, and they don't believe I have a serious thought in the world; but I have nevertheless, especially during the last few days; for I very nearly killed myself last Thursday week —

"Oh, that is the very thing I'll write about! 'Twill fill up lots of empty pages, and it does not matter much if any one sees it, for they all know about it; and if my story ever chanced to fall into the hands of some young fellow half as adventurous and wilful as I am, why it might be a warning to him not to meddle with what he has no right to touch.

"I only wish I had had some such warning myself before my accident; it would have saved me ever so much suffering and—and—*sorrow*. Yes, my dear friend diary, I may own it to you, for I have told mother already I am awfully sorry for what I did.

"Well, I needn't relate all the chaff and bother one has to put up with in school, for every boy in England knows it; but some of the fellows plagued me unbearably, and called me 'mother's darling' and 'young apronstring,' and a variety of horrid names, because after father died mother and I were

everything to each other; every night I told her all that happened during the day, and seldom did anything without her leave.

"Father's death was a great shock to her. He was out shooting with uncle Henry, and as they were climbing a fence uncle's gun went off and killed father on the spot. This happened when I was quite a little boy; but mother has never quite got over it; and no wonder.

"Well, Farmer Salter, the jolliest old soul you ever saw, gave some of the fellows in our school leave to shoot his rabbits. They were overrunning the whole place, and ruining everything. He had an old gun that he offered to lend them, turn about. I told mother all this the very evening I heard it; and wasn't she in a fright!

"She begged and begged me to have nothing to do with it, or at least to wait till the farmer had time to come with us, and not to go alone with a set of wild boys; but I laughed at her fears, and protested there was not the least danger. The offer had only been made to the biggest fellows in the school, and I would never be a man if she would not let me do as the others did.

"But I got grave enough when the tears came into her eyes, and she said, Though she could not bear to cross my wishes, and forbid me any amusement, yet she believed and trusted I would not have anything to do with the shooting, when I knew how nervous and anxious it made her. So no more was said about it, and I determined not to vex her.

"But, oh, it was such hard lines! All the fellows laughed and chaffed more than ever when I refused to go with them; and one fine half holiday they worried and tormented me to that degree that, though I declared I would not touch the gun, I allowed myself to be persuaded to go 'just for once,' and look on at the fun; but it wasn't for *once*, or even *twice*. Having given in one inch, the fellows took an ell, and would never let me off; so I continued to go regularly every half.

“Mother never asked what I did with myself, and each evening I put off telling her anything about it, fully intending never to go again ; but it cut me to the heart to see how entirely she trusted me.

“One day our Dux, a tall, broad-shouldered lad, who was awfully full of himself (imagined his features perfect, his manners irresistible, and was persuaded he had whiskers, though nobody else could see them), was firing away like fun, and I was close to him, carrying a brace of rabbits (he had just shot) over my shoulder, when something whizzed across my ear, and the whole contents of the gun lodged in a little sapling close behind me. All the fellows looked frightened at first, and then, seeing me unhurt, laughed as loud as ever they could. But though I tried to give a little chuckle, I could not feel the least bit jolly, it had been so awfully near hitting me ; and somehow—though indeed, old diary, I’m not a bit of a coward—I was shaking all over, burning hot, when I thought of mother, and shivering from head to foot when I remembered my narrow escape.

“I vowed to myself they should never get me there again, and was so steady next half that they gave me up as a bad job, and went off without me.

“However, I found it dull enough ; for those I cared most for had gone to the farm, and there was nothing left for me to do but wander through the town with my hands in my pockets, longing all the time to be with them.

“But I must confess I felt a bit happier in the evening when the gas was lighted, the curtains drawn, and mother and I sat by the fire : the evenings were just short and chilly enough to make the warmth pleasant and sociable.

“I did not turn away to avoid those loving, trustful eyes, that had seemed so reproachful to me during the last few weeks.

“I laughed and chatted at a great rate, and mother’s sweet pale face was all lit up with smiles. I wondered did she perceive the difference in me.

"But the following week—oh, diary, I can't bear to tell it, even to a silent old fellow like you!—the following week, between chaff and bullying, I was persuaded to go out again; and having acted so far against my conscience, it only needed a few more jeers and taunts to get me to take the old fowling-piece in my own hand *just for once*.

"Never again! I said to myself; only just this once, that I might be able to say I had fired a gun; besides, what nonsense it was of mother to be afraid of it, because uncle Henry's chanced to go off, and did such awful mischief. After all, you might as well say no sailor should ever put to sea again because the *Cospatrick* was lost. Such fears were all bosh from beginning to end, and I should prove it to mother by firing off three shots one after another, and come home to crow over her foolish terror, and show her how utterly unfounded it was.

"I knew perfectly well that the mere firing off the gun was no harm, it was only the disobedience that was wrong; but I told my bothering conscience to shut up, and shouldered the gun right valiantly.

"The jolliest little rabbit popped out of a hole before me, as if politely to invite my attention. I pulled the trigger; bang! it went off, giving my shoulder a nasty little kick. The smoke cleared away, and there was my little friend the rabbit lying on the bank as dead as a door nail. It was a lucky hit, and I got such a lot of praise from the fellows, that I loaded in the greatest possible hurry, and raised the gun again. We all then marched on in single file through the wood, I going first, because I carried the weapon. By-and-by another pretty little animal appeared, hopping along with upright ears in the funniest way. I stopped short, gave a warning look to the others to be quiet, and pulled the trigger. It did not go off as I expected. I pressed harder, and there was a tremendous report, that knocked me down. The old fowling-piece had burst!

"I don't know what happened next; but the first thing I remember is mother's sad, anxious face, as white as a sheet,

bending over me. It brightened up a little when she saw my eyes were open ; but, oh, what pain came with returning consciousness ! I shall never, never forget the next three weary days and nights of constant suffering. Poor mother was nearly worn out attending to me ; and when at length I grew a little better, she was quite laid up from the shock of seeing me brought home insensible, and the exertion of waiting on me night and day. This made me the more sorry for my disobedience and undutifulness ; and though I was hardly able to creep about myself, I tried to do everything I could for her ; and, oh, she was just like her own dear self, so kind and patient with me ! But one day she seemed so weak and ill, that an awful thought came into my head—What if the shock was really more than her strength could bear, and she should be taken away from me for my wickedness !

“The thought made me remember it was not only mother I had wronged and sinned against ; and, old diary, I don’t mind owning it to you, for you are such a famous old thing for keeping a secret, I went off to my little room—next to mother’s, you know, with a door opening between—and shutting both doors, I prayed to God for forgiveness for Jesus Christ’s sake, and I begged Him ever so earnestly to save mother’s life, and to spare her to me.

“But as I prayed, such a dreadful feeling came over me when I remembered the fifth commandment, and I wondered whether God would hear my prayer when I had so wilfully broken it, knowing all the time I was doing wrong : ‘Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.’

“But I had not honoured mother in my actions, though I loved her with my whole heart, and longed to please her, and work for her sake. The more I thought about my sin, the more ungrateful and wicked my conduct seemed. It was such a bad, cruel return for all her kindness, patience, and goodness to me. Besides, it is more than probable, if I had waited till I

was older and steadier, or at least till the farmer came with us, she would have given me free permission. She is so wise and judicious, I know she would conquer her fears, if she knew it to be for my good.

"Well, these thoughts made me awfully unhappy, and the more my mind dwelt on it, the more I feared God would not hear my prayer for mother. He had given her to me to love and cherish, and make her happy, and I had done just the reverse; so perhaps now He was about to take her away to Himself, where she would be happy, and be at peace for ever.

"But the evening of that very day I began to hope a little again.

"Mother was lying on the sofa in her bedroom, looking so fair and fragile, and I was sitting cross-legged on the hearthrug, looking straight into the fire.

"Mother perceived in a moment that I was downhearted and sad.

"‘My poor boy,’ she said, stroking back my hair with her fingers (she has such soft warm hands, you can’t think how soothing and delicious the touch is), ‘your head aches again, does it not?’

"‘No, thank you, mother; my left hand bothers me a little, that’s all. At least it isn’t—but ——’

"Mother’s eyes were fixed on my face, and I felt I was getting red all over, so I hid it in her pillow.

"‘But what?’ she asked gently.

"‘Mother,’ said I, pressing my nose very hard into the cushion, but determined to have it all out at once, and have done with it, ‘I was—I am so awfully sorry I went to the farm against your wishes, and—and—shot—fired—killed ——’

"Mother took my great hard hand in both her own, and pressed it—oh, so tenderly!—it made all I wanted to tell her much easier to say.

"‘You forgive me, mother, I know you do; but I should like to be sure and certain God forgives me too.’

“‘Have you asked Him?’ whispered mother softly.

“‘Yes,’ said I, coming out of the pillow a little; for my voice sounded quite smothered in it; ‘but I have broken His commandment, and disobeyed you, and I was afraid He might take—take you.’

“‘Do not be afraid to ask for forgiveness, my darling; go to Him, and confess your fault freely and sincerely, and pray to Him to pardon you, and wash away this and every sin in His blood. Remember that Christ was made sin for us, though He knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; and so, if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins. The Bible is full of His loving invitations to sinners and gracious offers of pardon.’

“‘But, mother,’ said I, not venturing to look up, for there were tears in my eyes that it was no good wiping away, for they came again every time; ‘mother, if He should take you?’

“‘If it were His will to take me, it would be in love to you, not in vengeance; for He is a God of love, full of loving-kindness and tender mercy. But indeed, my son, I do not think there is cause to fear for me now; I feel so much better and stronger to-night, and Dr. Harvey says I am daily gaining strength.’

“I said no more, for the joyful words seemed to go through and through me, and awaken new hope; and when shortly afterwards mother dismissed me to bed with her kind ‘good-night,’ and a softly-murmured blessing, I knelt down, and came to this great Advocate to enlist in His service, and fight under His banner. I mean to watch well against a cunning old enemy of mine, named ‘just this once,’ who has had one or two victories over me lately; but with the help of my good Captain, I hope to repulse him vigorously from henceforth.

“But now nearly all the blank pages of this little book are full, and my hand is quite tired; so I must have done my story,

only I can't help adding that I am a thousand million times happier, since I have been armed for the fight, than when I tamely submitted to the enemy ; and I hope any fellow who may happen to pick up my little book will flee to this great Commander for happiness and safety ; for, believe me, it is not to be found elsewhere ; and also that he will be warned by it to remember how dangerous 'just this once' has been to me, and how much evil and sorrow he may lead to.

"Many a fellow thinks, when he does wrong, that he is only making up a little friendship with 'just this once,' and that he can drop his acquaintance whenever he likes ; but there is nothing more deceptive and foolish. It is just like a person standing on a sloping sheet of ice, and declaring he is sure not to slip off. Why, the very moment he raises one foot both slide away together at a tremendous pace, and there's no stopping himself. If a kind friend does not throw a plank across to check him, he will slide into the awful chasm that yawns at the bottom, and be lost for ever.

"And now, dear old diary, here comes your last page, and I wish you good-bye. You have whiled away a profitable hour to me, and perhaps you may one day do the same for some one else."





CHAPTER XI.

JESSIE'S LESSON.

Knowledge Puffeth Up.

THE evening turned out wet, and the children, looking very disconsolate, trooped into the drawing-room.

Only Aunt Charlotte was there, dozing, as was her usual habit at that hour, in her large arm-chair. A little fire was burning in the grate, which the damp and drizzle outside made very acceptable.

"Come along," whispered Augustus, lifting a warning finger lest the others should awake the old lady; "it is awfully stupid here. Let us find out mamma, and make her tell us another story."

They softly closed the drawing-room door, and rushed noisily upstairs. Mrs. Stanton's sitting-room door was closed. Augustus knocked boldly.

"Come in," said the clear sweet voice that they were learning each day to respect, and even love.

They entered, and were astonished and somewhat disgusted to see Mrs. Stanton seated at the table, with an open book before her, and little Jessie Leonard standing composedly at her side.

"Well, I do declare!" said Augustus, planting his hands on his knees, and staring hard. "Wonders will never cease."

"Wait for two or three minutes, dears," said Mrs. Stanton; "we have just finished. Now, Jessie, try again."

"I forget the letter with the loop on top," said Jessie, looking very shy under the full gaze of so many pair of eyes.

So the lesson proceeded, and in rather less than the time specified it was over.

Jessie made a surprising little bob for a courtesy, and retired, leaving all the children free to make any observations they chose on her presence and appearance, which they were not slow to do.

"Well," said Augustus, when they had exhausted all kinds of remarks and exclamations on the subject, "I should have thought that we all were quite enough to manage without adding on some one else."

"I think all this is absolutely *wrong*," said Ada decidedly.

"What is wrong, Ada?"

"To waste our talents and time."

"To waste?"

"Yes," she answered, with increasing determination; "it is wasting the talents of educated people to teach things that it is other people's business to grind into their stupid heads."

"Of course," assented Augustus warmly; "why not send that child to school?"

"She is too ignorant to enter the girls' school," said Mrs. Stanton; "at least she considers herself so, and fears ridicule; and she does not—very naturally—like the thought of joining the infants' class."

"She should not have that kind of silly pride," said Ada. "I would not encourage it in her."

"How would you feel yourself under the circumstances, Ada?"

"Me!" said Ada disdainfully; "as if I could imagine myself for a moment to be in the position of a ragged, ignorant child like *that*."

"It is by no fault of her own that she is either ragged or uneducated," said Mrs. Stanton gravely. "Oxondown is a long way from Pope's Hollow; and just as she became old enough

and strong enough to walk over here, the strike occurred, and ruined them."

"Well," said Ada conceitedly, "nothing would ever induce me to teach her anything."

"Nor me," said Augustus proudly; "the idea of a fellow like me, who is head of the Greek class and second in mathematics, teaching A, B, C, to a little chit like that, would be really too absurd." And he laughed derisively.

"Do you ever think who gave you talent, opportunity, and health, to rise so high in the school?" asked his stepmother gently.

Augustus' mocking laughter subsided suddenly.

"Of course we all know that, mamma," said Ada.

"It was God," said Alfred reverently.

"Yes, dear child; and when He asks us to make use of a little portion of that talent in His holy service, shall we selfishly say we have got too much of it to spare any?"

"You always turn things so seriously," said Augustus, shrugging his shoulders.

"It is a serious subject."

"Well, if it is, we have talked quite enough about it," interrupted Ada. "We came up to know if you will tell us a story, mamma?"

"Do," entreated Augustus persuasively. "It is so wet; every thing looks dismal."

"We want something to interest us," chimed in Tom.

"Well, I don't know that I can promise you any thing very interesting. As my next letter is K, I shall call it,

Knowledge Puffeth Up.

"Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."—1 CORINTHIANS viii. 1.

"The transient rays of a winter's sun shone cheerfully into the long schoolroom of Ashdown Villa one Sunday afternoon, where several girls were seated; some industriously conning over the evening Scripture lesson, others mentally repeating

the same with closed eyes and moving lips. A few here and there had shut their Bibles, and laid them aside, while they lounged lazily over a Sunday story-book.

"One of these latter raised her head from the *Pilgrim's Progress* she was pretending to study, and closely watched a tall, fair-haired girl, some distance off, whose earnest looks, knitted brows, and concentrated attention attracted her observation.

"After a long, criticizing, and rather suspicious scrutiny, the owner of the *Pilgrim's Progress* laid that volume down, and stole softly over to her friend.

"'Georgie,' she whispered, peeping curiously over her shoulder, 'what *are* you at? I have been wondering this long time how you could find a lesson in the "Acts" so very insurmountable! *you* of all people!' she added, with an emphasis on the pronoun, intended to flatter her companion, and so prevent her showing the annoyance she felt at being thus unceremoniously disturbed. It had the desired effect; Georgina Rogers tried to smile as she covered the book hastily with both hands. But quick as the movement was, her sharp-sighted school-fellow had caught a glimpse of the German characters, and easily guessed it to be a volume of Schiller.

"'Oh, Georgie!' she exclaimed in a shocked whisper, 'learning German to-day?'

"'Well, what can I do, Laura?' muttered Georgina ruefully, as, finding concealment useless, she removed one of her hands and rested her cheek on it. 'I know you are a true little thing, and won't make a fuss about it; but the fact is I am run to a corner for time.'

"'You did not begin to prepare soon enough,' said Laura, perching herself on the top of the desk, with her feet on the form. 'It was too late even for *you*; for it is no flattery to tell you, Georgie, that you are by far the cleverest girl in the school; always were, and always will be.'

"Laura had found out by long experience that such speeches

were always more or less acceptable to her friend, and never spared them.

“‘There was, of course, no need for me to work the whole of the term like most of the girls,’ said Georgie somewhat haughtily; ‘but still perhaps I am afraid I put off preparation a fortnight or so too long.’

“Fishing for compliments in such a pool as Laura’s fawning temperament was easy work; every throw of the net brought forth plentifully.

“‘Work or no work,’ she said, ‘not one of us have a chance of the prize while you are at school; there am I the whole term drudging, drudging, drudging, and not the ghost of a chance of getting any thing by it. What would I give to have the tenth part of your talent!’

“‘It is an advantage certainly,’ said Georgina, as usual taking the bait, and closing the book with a self-satisfied air; ‘but where is this afternoon’s lesson to be found?’

“‘The Acts of the Apostles. Shall I find it?’

“‘Never mind, that will do; I don’t want to look at it; I know the whole Bible by heart from beginning to end.’

“Her friend replied only by a little laugh and an admiring glance.

“‘But, Laura,’ proceeded Georgina Rogers more gravely, ‘do you know I am not so sure of obtaining the prize this year as you seem to be; that little Ellen Harper makes me very uneasy sometimes, she gets on so fast, and between her diligence and little coaxing, timid ways she has become a wonderful pet of Miss Layton’s.’

“‘I don’t think Miss Layton makes pets,’ said Laura decidedly. ‘There is nothing she considers so unjust as favouritism; and as to that child Ellen Harper, you need never fear her for a rival. She is slower and more stupid even than I am.’

“Laura was rewarded by a soft kiss for this humble speech, and Georgina smoothed back her pretty fair hair with a sigh of relief.

"Just then one of the under teachers came in, and announced that Miss Layton was ready for the Scripture lesson; but as her cold was still troublesome, she would be glad to receive the young ladies in her own sitting-room.

"Georgina slipped the German book into her pocket, and there was a general move towards the door.

"A gentle-looking little brown-eyed maiden was passing on with the stream, when Georgina Rogers thrust her rudely back, and stalked proudly out before her. The other girls tittered and stared at the flushed cheeks and quivering lips of the child, who quietly waited till all were gone, and followed them, brushing away a tear.

"Miss Layton's private sitting-room was in the opposite wing of the house, and a very pretty little retreat it was, fitted up with all kinds of comforts, and just now looking particularly pleasant and inviting, with the crimson curtains shutting out the dreary winter twilight, and a bright fire burning in the grate. There was no other light as the girls trooped in, and found seats where they could, their kind teacher begging all to draw their chairs close round the fire.

"'Well, young ladies,' she said, a sweet smile lighting up her gentle, refined countenance, 'I am very glad to be able to see you all again; and as my voice is not very strong yet, instead of my giving the usual lesson, we shall all have a little talk together. I have already chosen a subject which I think very applicable, now that you are all running the race for the Christmas prize, and it still remains a matter of great uncertainty who will be the successful candidate. We shall talk a little about the verse in 1 Corinthians viii. : "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." What is the meaning of edifieth?'

"'Buildeth up,' said little Ellen Harper in a low, timid whisper.

"'Yes; knowledge puffs up, but charity builds up. I think we all need to be reminded of this, especially in a time like the present, when progress and emulation are the order of the day.

You will find that knowledge for the mere sake of knowledge, or knowledge gained only with a desire to out-do and excel others, and to stand pre-eminent oneself—this is the knowledge that puffs up.’

“‘But it does not follow, that because we try hard for the prize that we are puffed up!’ exclaimed Georgina Rogers, with some irritation in her tone.

“‘No; the prize is given to encourage real, deep, intelligent study;’ and if it is sought for with hard work, sincere desire to improve, and, above all, an earnest wish to serve God in the path in which His good providence has placed us, such emulation is good, wholesome, and necessary.’

“‘But surely one must desire to excel others in a greater or less degree.’

“‘Yes; but there are different kinds of emulation: one a bitter, unwholesome fruit, whose aim and idol is *self*—self-love, self-advancement, self-aggrandisement; the other, a tender plant, that is much more rare, and seldom blooms freely in the frosts and storms of this troublesome world. Dear girls, I should like to see it more cultivated among us here; I should like to see you all bearing in mind that Christ has given each of you natural talents in different measure, that each, according to her capacity, may use and improve it to His service, remembering that it is a gift—a free gift of God—of which He could deprive you at any moment, and therefore nothing whereof to be proud or vain,—rather a great responsibility, of which we read, that “to whom much is given, of them shall much be required;” and so it must be used industriously, steadily, perseveringly, and holily, each one realizing thoroughly that it is a trust committed by God to your care, and therefore must be exerted with all your might, entirely and solely, to Him and for Him.’

“Miss Layton spoke very solemnly, and there was a long silence.

“‘Charity buildeth up,’ said one of the girls at length. ‘How is that, Miss Layton?’

“ ‘When we first come to Christ to be forgiven, and have all our guilt and sin cleansed by His precious blood, our hearts are made an habitation of God through the Spirit, and this hidden abode of the Holy Spirit is, as it were, a building erected to the service of God. The greater stones of this sacred building are supreme love to God above all His creatures; the lesser ones might be called love to our neighbour. These last fill up the chinks and interstices, and make our daily life smooth and even without. They are composed of kind words, unselfishness, sympathy, cheerfulness, patience, forbearance, and many others. The chief corner-stone of this holy edifice is Christ, “in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”’ ”

“ ‘Are we all temples?’ asked Laura Hastings.

“ ‘All of you who were brought to Him in baptism, and whose burden of sin has been cast away at the foot of the cross, are temples of the Holy Ghost.’ ”

“ ‘It is a wonderful thought,’ murmured little Ellen Harper.

“ ‘It is, dear; it is a thought that gives us a slight conception of the love of God, His marvellous condescension to poor sinners such as we are, when He says, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” I pray and trust, my dears, that you will all take care that *head-knowledge*, which tends to puff up, may be controlled and balanced by *heart-knowledge*, which is to know the love of Christ, that passeth all knowledge. The first, indeed, avails little without the second; for what would you think of a soldier who went to battle with his head crammed—abstruse questionings, deep arguments, and diligent researches in learning, but who was undrilled, unexercised, and unarmed? Would he not be inclined to flee at the first approach of the enemy, and be incapable of making the least defence?’ ”

“ ‘There was a short silence. All the girls looked grave and thoughtful.

“ ‘Head-knowledge alone,’ proceeded Miss Layton, ‘is like

a balloon, puffed out and inflated with air, floating upward in the sunshine of prosperity, an object of wonder and admiration to every one, but dangerous and variable, driven about by every current of air; and if it should be pierced by any instrument, even an insignificant speck, it collapses instantly, and falls a shapeless, worthless mass to the ground; but *heart-knowledge*, the knowledge of God, builds up; and though the structure may progress but slowly, yet laboriously and patiently one stone is laid upon another, and each day it grows in size, and strength, and beauty, till at length it becomes a strong building, firm to resist every storm, and filled within with love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Well, little Ellen Harper, what do you wish to say? I see you are full of something.'

"'Mamma spoke to me about this verse,' said Ellen, blushing, 'the night before I left home. She said—a—that——'

"'Well, my dear? You know, this is to be a conversation, so we must all take part in it.'

"'Mamma said something about a balloon too, Miss Layton, but it was a little different. She thought knowledge was like one of those fire-balloons that go up steadily as long as the light of love burns beneath the gauzy thing; but when that is extinguished, it sails away into darkness, a worthless, useless thing, till the gas is exhausted, and then down it comes. It is not quite the same thought as yours, Miss Layton, is it?'

"'No, my dear; but something like it. God grant that none of my pupils, not even those gifted with rare talents, may be tempted to overlook the responsibility they entail, and begin to think they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, knowing not that without Christ they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. May He in His infinite mercy grant that this may not be the sad, hopeless case of any of you, my dear children.'

"The great bell sounded for tea, and all the girls rose, and wishing a kind good-night to their instructor, left her to

assemble once more in the large dining-room. It was a quieter meal than usual to-night, for Miss Layton's warning impressed them all, even the most thoughtless, and especially the three who, being most likely of success, had felt the most anxiety in the matter.

"Little Ellen Harper was thankful for the caution her teacher's words contained; it helped her much in her struggle with the powerful foes Ambition and Envy, and strengthened her resolution to banish all thoughts of the competitive examination from times and places in which she knew it ought not to intrude—at the morning and evening school prayers, at church, and during the daily half hour of private devotion.

"Laura, too, was interested; for it gave her curious, speculative mind something new to dwell upon, and afforded her some occupation and amusement to watch how far the higher motive influenced the others.

"In Georgian's clever mind the thought caused only vexation and annoyance. She could not shut her eyes to the truth of her teacher's words, and hated their interference with her worldly-ambitious aims, so that when tea was over she stealthily took out the lesson-book again, and hid it in the leaves of the *Sunday at Home*.

"The next ten days fled rapidly away, and the final issue of the contest was doubtful as ever.

"Laura got through her work in a hasty, scrambling way, that made Georgina Rogers put forth all her powerful energy to strive to surpass her; but it was not so easy to gain upon the steady industry little Ellen had maintained throughout the whole term, and Georgina's long unacknowledged jealousy of the child was now too palpable to be hidden any longer. Hitherto it had been shown in manner only; but now it found vent in bitter, cutting words and unkind actions, that sunk deeply and painfully into Ellen's sensitive heart.

"However, the eve of the eventful day dawned at length.

"Laura sat listlessly turning over the pages of an English

history, and as all conversation was forbidden, she held secret communication every now and then with her next neighbour by a course of winks, signs, and nods, some of which were intelligible to all. One especially so: she knotted the four corners of her handkerchief together, and blowing into the centre to puff it out, threw it upwards, and pretended to watch the balloon sail over her head; this, with a sideways glance at the place where her friend Georgina sat, looking anxious, restless, and absorbed, was not difficult to understand, and caused a general titter. Ellen Harper, the only one who did not join in the laugh, glanced nervously at Georgina; but she seemed too far lost in thought to perceive the unkindness. Her brow was flushed, her eyes heavy, and to little Ellen's sympathizing heart she seemed far from well; but throughout the busy day she made no complaint; only at night, when she rested the fair, weary head on the pillow, did she give way to the depression and weariness that oppressed her, and burst into a violent fit of weeping.

"The two other occupants of her room, Ellen Harper and an older girl, were aghast at this unusual spectacle, particularly alarming in a person ordinarily so calm, cold, and proud as Georgina. But she rejected with manifest irritation Ellen's timidly-offered sympathy, and the trio retired to rest in silence.

"Next morning a general gloom was spread throughout the whole school. Georgina Rogers lay dangerously ill. The doctor pronounced it to be an attack of a most alarming character. The Christmas proceedings were postponed, and for many days life and death hung wavering in the balance.

"Great anxiety was manifested amongst the girls; all envy and emulation was now laid aside, and all remembered sadly the many noble and even generous traits that had adorned the character of their schoolmate. Laura and Ellen felt it especially, the latter very deeply; for graver fears were mingled with the suspense.

"At length the crisis came. The vigorous constitution grappled

with its powerful enemy, and Georgina was pronounced out of danger. Great was the relief the tidings afforded downstairs, and deep and fervent were the thanksgivings of Ellen Harper.

"When she had made considerable progress on the way towards recovery, an early day was fixed for the examination, as the Christmas holidays were fast approaching, when all would be obliged to disperse to their several homes.

"As any excitement or anxiety would be prejudicial to the invalid, the day was kept a profound secret from her. The girls' work during the term, including Georgina's, was impartially reviewed, and the prize awarded to Ellen Harper. This result gave universal satisfaction in the school. The little girl was a general favourite, and all rejoiced that her patient industry had gained its due reward.

"What would Georgina say?" was the question that perplexed them all; and as one by one the girls were allowed to sit with her during her slow convalescence, 'Which of them would venture to break it to her? How would the proud spirit endure it?' They were not long left to indulge these speculations; for a few days after the prize was given, it was Ellen's turn to sit with the invalid, and as Georgina lay watching the flickering firelight glance fitfully over the furniture of the large bedroom, Ellen laid down the book of hymns she had been repeating rather than reading; for she felt Georgina's large eyes fixed intently on her face. She bore the earnest gaze with a slight accession of colour for a moment, then raised her eyes to meet it.

"It is yours, Ellen, is it not? The prize I mean.'

"Yes,' said Ellen, in surprise.

"I guessed it a day or two ago,' said Georgina quietly, 'by your face.'

"Ah, Georgina,' exclaimed Ellen wistfully, 'how could you? Did I look so very glad?'

"No; on the contrary, you looked so very, *very* pitiful whenever your eyes fell on me. I could not help thinking it was for

something else besides my illness and the loss of all my hair.' and she pushed back the short fair locks that curled over her pale brow. Ellen gazed at her hesitatingly, unable to remain silent, yet almost afraid to speak.

" 'I suppose,' continued the invalid, in the same low, quiet tone, 'Miss Layton desired I should not be told?'

" 'Yes; and the doctor said so too.'

" 'They need not have been afraid, Ellen. I knew, when my head ached so, that I could not overtake you, and if I had, I could never have enjoyed gaining the prize, for I acted unfairly, and studied when I ought to have been thinking of other things; so you see,' she added, with a slight smile, 'I was prepared for a disappointment, and I have been wishing to tell you I am very glad you gained it.'

" Ellen's cheek flushed. *This* from her proud, jealous rival, who had never let slip an opportunity to annoy and humble her! It was wonderfully strange, she thought to herself, as she thanked her in a gentle, earnest way that gratified Georgina exceedingly.

" 'Ellen,' she said, when they had both been silent for some time, 'the unkind way I treated you lately was one of the things that weighed heavily on me when—when I was so very near death; not *the* heaviest, for the most terrible thought of all was having neglected God; and, oh, such a little foolish thing the prize seemed to me then! Miss Layton has been so kind, and lately we have had many long talks together; and, oh, Ellen, I wish all the girls would think much about that Sunday lesson we had some weeks ago. I spoke to Laura about it yesterday. Poor girl, she cried so; I believe the words are graven on her heart, as they are on mine, I trust, for ever. 'Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.'"





CHAPTER XII.

DWARF GRUDGE DEFEATED.

Little Foes Cause Greater Woes.

“WELL, if this is not the most lucky piece of business! Ever so much of the money is gone!”

“What money?”

“Our collection for the Leonards.”

“But why *lucky*?”

“Because that young thief is in the house every day, and now we shall be able to prove him guilty.”

“I doubt that,” said Ada; “he is so clever, he is sure to get out of it somehow; and mamma will believe any story he chooses to invent. How much is it?”

“Two shillings.”

“How did you find out it was gone?”

“I was playing ball in the drawing-room with one of mamma’s balls of white wool, and hearing her step, I darted forward to catch it, and overturned the little table. I just saved her black velvet bag by catching it as it was sliding off, and the clasp being open, I looked to see that it was all right, and two shillings of it were gone!”

“I am glad it did not fall on the floor, or mamma would surely say the money had rolled about the room somewhere. I never saw anyone so slow to believe a person guilty.”

“She is slow to blame anyone,” said Augustus meditatively; “don’t you remark it even with us?”

"I don't think we are always so much to be blamed," said Ada, tossing her head.

"Perhaps not. Where's Tom? I saw him slip away a minute ago. Katie is gone too, and Alfie; perhaps they went to tell her about it."

"Very likely. I never saw anyone so changed as Tom is lately; he is so silent, and pale, and miserable-looking."

"He looks more sneaky than ever."

"I hope mamma is proud of the success of her good work in him," said Ada contemptuously.

At this moment Mrs. Stanton came in.

"I am very much vexed and grieved about this," she said. "Will you ring the bell, Gus, please?"

"Have you asked about it yet, mamma?"

"Yes; I can find out nothing. Nurse has been trying by signs to make Rolf understand it is missing, and I have sent for the little sister."

"Yes-'m," said the servant, appearing in answer to the summons.

"Nurse tells me you have some idea who took this money, Grimes."

"Well, ma'am, I can't say for certain who took it, but I'm positive the drawing-room windows was both of 'em wide open, and Rolf was bending over the sill of the one near the table. I passed by, making sure you were inside talking to him."

"No, I have not been there this morning."

The man shook his head, and muttering it was "a bad business," left the room.

"What are you going to do about it, mamma?"

"Nothing till Jessie comes."

"It is always school-time just when I want to stay at home," sighed Ada. "Come, Gus, there are the little ones off already down the avenue."

Augustus expressed his reluctance to go in no measured terms, and they set off.

A few hours afterwards they all rushed back, eager for the news.

Mrs. Stanton met them on the lawn, and told them that she had seen Jessie, who said that Rolf denied all knowledge of the money, and so she was obliged to dismiss the boy from the house till the mystery was solved.

"Mystery solved!" echoed Augustus scornfully; "surely you cannot doubt for a moment that he has taken it, especially after all that Grimes told us."

"Aunt Charlotte says that, wishing to see our young *protégé*, she beckoned to him as he passed the window, and coming forward, he leant for a moment on the window-sill, looking at her earnestly, and then went away."

"That looks odd."

"It does not look as if he had anything to say to it."

Tom, who had lingered near as long as he dared to hear what had happened in his absence, now crept off to the garden, and concealing himself under a currant-bush, crouched down on the ground.

The protracted misery of the last few days was now becoming unendurable. The loss to Jessie of her reading-lessons, to Rolf of his situation, was bad enough, but the remembrance of the poor sick woman was agony to him. Slow, lingering death by starvation seemed now inevitable for the whole family, and Tom absolutely groaned aloud at the magnitude of the consequences of his one act. He heard the bell ring for tea, but would not venture into the house. He heard first the children, and then the servants, looking for him in every direction, but he only hid himself the more carefully.

The sun had gone down behind the distant hills, the air was sharp and chilly, the dew glistened on every blade of grass, when at length he crept slowly and stiffly out of his hiding-place, and stealing unperceived by the back staircase, gained his room in safety.

Alfred had cozily nestled into bed when Tom entered. He

made a sleepy enquiry as to where he had been all the evening, and without waiting for an answer fell fast asleep.

Feeling unutterably desolate and wretched, Tom sat down by the window. As he did so his eyes fell accidentally on the Bible his stepmother had read to him the night of the storm, and the entire expression of his face changed. For some minutes he sat lost in thought, gazing out vacantly on the misty blue mountains, then suddenly falling on his knees, buried his face in his hands.

It was a hard fight for the little soldier, a long, bitter struggle ; but he was once again on the Lord's side, and his great Captain stood by to help him. But yet his enemies would not give up easily one whom they had almost gained over to themselves, and twice he walked resolutely to the door, and twice he returned shamefacedly to his seat, before he finally yielded himself up to his Master's guidance, and running quickly down stairs, opened the drawing-room door.

Without daring to raise his eyes, or advance one step into the room, with flushed cheek and steady voice he confessed all. The victory was won, and, unheeding the surprised exclamations of Augustus, Ada, and Katie, he was soon at Mrs. Stanton's side, asking her forgiveness, and begging her to take back Rolf, and teach Jessie once more. Mrs. Stanton promised to send to them that evening, as one of the servants was taking a message in the same direction.

"Is that the reason you wanted me to promise not to say you were up that night?" asked Katie innocently.

"Yes," he said, with a blush ; "I was so ashamed of taking my money back again. But it was not my own after I had given it, was it, mamma?"

"No, Tom ; *then* it belonged to your dear Lord and Master. No longer *yours*, but *His*."

"Mamma," said Tom, after a thoughtful pause, "it was little Dwarf Grudge who lay in wait for me that night."

"Yes, dear. It is often the case, that little foes cause greater woes."

"That would be a very nice name for a story, mamma," said Augustus; "and beginning with L, it would do for our next."

"Tell it now," pleaded Katie.

The others all joined in the request, and Mrs. Stanton readily complied, and began—

Little Foes Cause Greater Woes.

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"—JAMES iii. 5.

"Crash went Jim Trafford's old cricket-ball through Squire Head's new greenhouse, breaking a pane of glass, and overturning a flower-pot.

"Jim turned to his companion, Ned Galeford, with a groan of consternation.

"'Let's run!'" he exclaimed, trembling with fear.

"Both boys galloped off full speed, and Ned, by far the fleetest of the two, soon left his companion far behind.

"Poor Jim had hardly gone a dozen yards, when he was overtaken, and a heavy hand laid on his shoulder.

"'Halloa, my young lad!'" growled gardener Robins's deep, gruff voice in his ear, and the hand that held him administered a rough shaking. 'What are you after, eh? Speak out. Which of you broke the pane of glass in the greenhouse just now?'

"Jim panted, and gasped for breath, and after an instant's hesitation, pointed to his fast-retreating companion.

"'He!'" exclaimed the gardener, believing the mute gesture much more easily than Jim had expected. 'What is his name?'

"'Ned Galeford.'

"'Ha! Ned Galeford. I'll settle it with him by-and-by, and make an example of him. Boys shieing stones in the street has become a shocking nuisance. Don't you ever let me find you at it, or you'll catch it. D'ye hear?' and another rough shake added emphasis to his words.

"'Yes, sir,' replied Jim with downcast eyes; and the man let him go, and returned to his work.

"Jim could hardly realize that he was set free—that without

opening his lips he, the guilty one, had been acquitted, and his innocent friend convicted. He walked slowly on, feeling half-frightened still, and not too well pleased with himself. Conscience was speaking loudly. It told him over and over again that it was his own hand that threw the mischievous ball, and he ought to go back instantly, confess all, and bear the anger and punishment that was no doubt in store for the offender. 'But I did not tell a lie,' answered Jim to this troublesome little monitor. 'I just raised my hand, and put out my first finger; and what is the harm of doing that, I should like to know?'

"But the little voice was the more urgent, and would not be silenced by such reasoning. 'You determined to become a soldier of the cross, little Jim,' it said, 'and now you are acting unworthily of your good Captain in submitting to one of His greatest foes.'

"*'Greatest!'* repeated Jim with scorn, 'just to raise my hand. I told no lie. If it is a foe, it must be a very small one.'

"*'Little foes cause greater woes,'* protested conscience.

"Jim shook himself pettishly, and was delighted just then to meet his brother Johnnie. The busy chatter and loud laughter during the rest of the walk home rendered the importunate little voice inaudible, at least for the present.

"In the meantime Ned Galeford returned to his cottage, feeling rather put out and vexed with himself. 'Why did I run away?' he asked himself; 'I had done no harm; but Jim startled me so, I scarce knew what I was about. Anyhow, I am engaged by Mr. Robins, that is one comfort; and mother shan't know what need is while I can work for her.' He raised the latch, and entered, meeting, as he did so, the pleasant, cheerful face that, however worn by suffering (for his mother was a great invalid), always wore a bright smile for him. How doubly glad and thankful he felt that he had now some means of testifying his love for her, by earning sufficient for her main-

tenance! His own answering smile as he approached the bed was made all the more sweet and tender by the thought of the pleasure it would give him next Saturday to pour out his earnings before her delighted gaze.

“‘Well, mother,’ he said, ‘I saw Mr. Robins early this morning, and it is quite settled. I am to begin work to-morrow, and Mr. Head will give me six shillings a week to begin with; and if he finds me useful and steady, he says he will increase it gradually. Is it not jolly?’

“‘Very good of Him, my son. I have been thanking God all day for His boundless mercy to us both.’

“‘Yes,’ said Ned gravely, as he set the table for the evening meal; and having poked up the little fire, proceeded to put on the kettle. ‘I did not forget to do that too, mother; He has been very good to me.’

“With what a hopeful heart he rose at cock-crow next morning! with what care he arranged the little breakfast within easy reach of his sleeping mother when he had finished his own, and tied up a crust and an apple in an old handkerchief to take with him for his dinner! and with what bounding steps he trod the quiet village street, and directed his way to Squire Head’s pretty white house and well-kept garden!

“Mr. Robins’s little cottage at the garden gate was very still, and the upper shutters closed; so Ned employed himself in raking together some fallen leaves till his master should make his appearance. Half an hour passed away, and the clock struck six. Ned was so interested in his work, that he did not perceive the gardener was standing by him, till the hoarse, stern voice that had terrified Jim so much the day before broke upon his ear, saying, ‘Well, Ned Galeford, what have you to say for yourself?’

“Ned’s mind was so full of the one idea of helping his mother, and giving her some of the little comforts she so much needed, that he looked up with genuine respect and gratitude as he answered, ‘I have to say how much obliged I am to you,

sir, for trying me a bit, and I hope I'll never give you cause to repent of your kindness.'

"'That is all very fine,' said Robins, somewhat mollified; 'but I had rather hear you say you were sorry for the mischief you did yesterday, and that you would be more careful for the future.'

"'The mischief!' exclaimed Ned, looking up in surprise; then meeting the stern eyes fixed upon him, he suddenly remembered the accident. His eyes fell to the ground again, and he blushed crimson.

"The gardener's angry brow relaxed a little more.

"'I'm glad to see you don't attempt to deny it; but to teach you to be more careful in future, I've half a mind to stop a couple of shillings from your wages to pay for it.'

"'Stop a couple of shillings!' cried Ned, looking up, pale with consternation. 'Oh, surely not, sir; I never did it! I——'

"'Galeford,' said the gardener angrily, 'drop that rake, and leave the place instantly. I *could* have overlooked the accident. I *won't* forgive a lie. Go; I won't hear another word. You may find work elsewhere.'

"'But, sir ——'

"'Did you hear me?' cried the man passionately. 'Go; it is better to have it so at once than to be always bothered by suspicion of your deceit and lying. Be off!' And the old gardener turned indignantly away, went into his pretty latticed cottage, and shut the door. With a bursting heart Ned dropped the wooden rake, and went home.

"When old Robins threw himself, all heated and full of wrath, into his comfortably-cushioned chair by his kitchen fire, not a thought of relenting towards the boy crossed his mind; but by-and-by, after a warm breakfast, his indignation abated considerably, and at length melted into something like compassion.

"'His mother is bed-ridden for life,' he thought to himself, 'and may be taken away from him at any moment. A youth

spent in hard, honest toil might be the saving of the lad. If I see him passing by the gate, I'll give him a call, and have it out with him. There may be some good in him after all.'

"However, the day passed on, and no Ned Galeford went by; but towards evening Jim Trafford walked down the road whistling, with his hands in his pockets, trying to feel at his ease. The gardener leaned over the gate.

"'Here, Trafford!'

"Jim's heart went pit-a-pat. He crossed the road leisurely enough, and came up to him.

"'I say,' said Mr. Robins gravely, 'are you quite sure 'twas Galeford threw the ball?'

"The question showed Jim there was doubt of his innocence still.

"'I *can't* confess myself a liar,' he thought; "'twould be all over the village, and I'd be ruined. I'm in for it now, and must go through with it at all costs.'

"'Yes, sir,' he said aloud.

"'To which of you did it belong?'

"'In for a penny, in for a pound,' thought Jim, and he answered, 'To Ned, sir.'

"'He says he did not do it.'

"'Then why did he run so fast?' said Jim, growing reckless in his extremity. 'I couldn't keep up with him nohow.'

"'Why did you run?' asked the gardener sharply.

"'If I had been the only one standing there, sir, you'd ha' thought 'twas me.'

"'Aye, sure enough; that will do,' said Mr. Robins with a concluding nod. 'Perhaps it is better to leave matters as they are,' he added to himself. 'Ned blushed like a turkey-cock when I asked him, and never tried to deny it till I spoke of deducting it from his wages. That looked bad—very bad;' and with a portentous shake of the head, the old gardener dismissed the matter from his mind.

"Days and weeks passed on. Jim Trafford got work at a

farm about two miles from the village, and he and Ned had never met since the day of the accident to the greenhouse. The latter had made many attempts to meet Jim, hoping to persuade him to speak to the old gardener, and clear his (Ned's) character by making a full confession ; but Jim carefully eluded him on every occasion, and successfully avoided an interview.

“ But one day Jim's master had occasion to send him into the village on business, and with ill-concealed reluctance Jim set forth. He was obliged to pass Ned's cottage. The door was shut, and all around and within was perfectly still and silent. Jim hastened past ; but on his return, as he was again hurrying by, he heard himself called. It was not Ned's voice ; so he stopped, and looked back.

“ ‘ Look 'ee, little Trafford,’ said a kind-looking woman standing in the front walk of Ned's neat garden ; ‘ will 'ee step in here a moment ? I must go ; for my Tom will be home for his dinner ; but I'll be sure to step round again in two minutes. Will 'ee, like a good boy, just stop with Mrs. Galeford whilst I'm gone ? She don't ought to be left alone for a moment.’

“ Jim stopped short, and scraped his muddy foot slowly on the edge of the pavement. The request was wonderfully unpleasing to him for more reasons than one ; but it was not easy to refuse ; so, after another pathetic appeal from the good neighbour, he complied ungraciously enough, and entered the cottage. How different it was from his own ! Want and poverty had set its mark on every piece of the wretched, shattered furniture ; all so scrupulously clean, though patched and well-worn. Mrs. Galeford lay as usual in bed, her quiet, sleeping face, white as the pillow on which it rested. Jim thought of his own mother's vigorous health ; of the comparative luxury in which they lived on the weekly earnings of father, Johnnie, and himself, and a pang shot through his heart. He was startled by Mrs. Galeford opening her eyes, and looking wistfully and eagerly around.

“ ‘ 'Tis very near,’ she said feebly. ‘ Where is he ?’

“‘What is very near?’ asked Jim, in a frightened whisper, as he removed a chair and table from beside the bed, fearing their proximity oppressed or annoyed her. She did not seem to hear. Her hands were lightly locked in each other; her eyes raised, with a far-off look in them that terrified him.

“‘Rise,’ she murmured, after a short pause, ‘the Master calleth thee!’

“There was a long, breathless silence, then she looked round again.

“‘Mrs. Watkins will be back presently,’ faltered Jim, answering the look.

“A faint tinge of colour dyed the white cheek of the dying woman.

“‘Ned,’ she whispered faintly.

“‘I shall fetch him in one moment.’ He got up and went to the door; the good-natured face of the next-door neighbour met his as he opened it; but he hardly heard her thanks, he was so cast down by what he had just witnessed. He stopped as he reached the little garden gate. A struggle was going on in his mind. Should he meet, could he dare to meet, Ned, whom he had injured, face to face, and bring him to his mother?

“The contest did not last long. Jim turned from the quiet country road to the farm, and directed his way to the village.

“He felt sure Ned was not far off; he had very likely gone to fetch something for his mother, otherwise he would never have left her at such a time; so Jim watched, and made enquiries; and very soon the boy he had so deeply wronged emerged from a side street, and they met.

“Jim felt the hot colour rush to his brow, and Ned turned very pale: it was but too evident from his wan, anxious appearance he had found no employment since.

“‘Jim,’ he said sadly, but without any anger in his tone, ‘where did you come from?’

“‘Your mother sent me for you,’ said Jim, unable to meet the sorrowful gaze of his former friend and companion.

“Ned passed his arm through Jim’s without another word, and the two boys walked back in silence.

“Mrs. Galeford was lying perfectly still, dozing as before when they came. Jim stood trembling on the threshold, and Ned withdrew his arm and knelt by the bedside.

“‘Poor dearie,’ sighed Mrs. Watkins, as she sank into a chair, and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. ‘’Tis just want of proper nourishment and care as has killed her!’

“This was more than Jim could bear to hear. He stole out of the cottage, and sat down in a tumult of grief and despair on the low garden wall.

“‘’Tis *I* that have done it!’ he groaned aloud. ‘Such a little beginning! How the rhyme rang in my ears then and ever since, “Little foes cause greater woes.” I only raised my finger and pointed, and it has led to murder!’

“The thought was torture. Conscience continued her reproaches so loudly, he got up full of the intention of telling all to his mother; but the weight of his sin could not be borne till he reached his home; so turning aside into a little grove by the roadside, he knelt and poured out his whole confession to God, implored His forgiveness through the atonement of His dear Son Jesus Christ, and then with a lightened heart went home and explained all to his mother.

“How glad he was that he had done so; for she no sooner heard of Mrs. Galeford’s precarious condition, than she thought of ever so many little things that might be tried in the hope of reviving and strengthening her. She went at once to the cottage, after setting Jim’s great fault so solemnly before him that he dared not accompany her, but remained behind to pray, as he had never prayed before, that God would have mercy upon him, and bless the means used, and if according to His good will, spare poor Ned this irreparable loss.

“It was not till next morning that Mrs. Trafford returned with a cheering account of the sick woman. Poor Jim, who had passed a sleepless, miserable night, no sooner heard the good

tidings than he set off with a beating heart for Mr. Robins' pretty lodge. The old gardener was at home. With quivering lips Jim told his story; but his mother had heard the same with such deep, quiet sorrow, Ned had met him so kindly after the cruel wrong, that Jim was ill-prepared for the storm of anger with which the old man received his confession.

"He justly estimated that an untruth so readily acted, so doggedly repeated, deserved punishment, and Jim received a severe caning before the old gardener bestowed on him one word of forgiveness.

"The next week passed in alternate hopes and fears, anxiety and thankfulness, and then nourishment and care showed their good effect on the invalid, and Mrs. Galeford was pronounced out of danger.

"The very next Monday Ned began his work for Mr. Head, under the old gardener's surveillance, and each day the quiet, honest, truthful boy gained on Mr. Robins's affection and respect.

"In after years, when the old man died, Ned Galeford succeeded him as head-gardener, and his best and truest friend in the village was Jim Trafford, who, having learned a bitter but salutary lesson, grew up to be an upright and honourable man."





CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND.

Many Mercies.

THE next day Tom replaced the two shillings in the bag ; but while he felt keenly that all, even the servants, Rolf and Jessie, must know how he had been tyrannized over by hideous Dwarf Grudge, he was thankful at least to be spared the mockery and contempt of Augustus and Ada. The latter pitied him, and the former appreciated and respected the moral courage he had shown in openly confessing his fault ; so the little soldier took heart again, and walked throughout that day more warily, more humbly, and more closely with his great Commander.

When school was over they all went to Oxondown with Mrs. Stanton, to lay out to the best advantage the contents of the velvet bag ; and after some time spent in the difficult selection, they drove off to Pope's Hollow, each child carrying a parcel.

Jessie and Rolf were not at home, but they found the poor woman well cared for by Mr. Hewitt's old servant, and gradually recovering strength and consciousness. After a short visit they left the packages with her, and returning to the carriage, heard children's voices in a little thicket by the roadside.

"Perhaps the two little Leonards are there," said Mrs. Stanton, turning from the path.

They all followed her, and pushing aside the brushwood, found a party of children sitting in an irregular circle on the

ground. Rolf was leaning against a tree at a little distance watching Jessie, who, standing in the centre of the picturesque little group, with a face of solemn importance, was holding up a piece of broken slate for their inspection.

"You see, children," she was saying, as the Stantons drew near unperceived, "the letter T is something the shape of the men's pick-axes, so it's easy to remember, and I expect you will all know it to-morrow; and this" she said, after a short pause, during which she had been busily scratching another letter on the fragment of slate, "this is U."

"It ain't," said a little red-haired fellow, looking affronted.

"Yes, it is."

"Then it ain't a bit loike us!"

Jessie broke into a merry laugh, and looking up perceived the visitors.

She came up to them shyly, and her little class dispersed in a moment.

"That's a good child," said Mrs. Stanton approvingly; "I am glad to find you try to teach other little ones."

"They very nigh knows all I do now," she said wistfully.

"And would you like me to teach you some more?"

Jessie's bright face crimsoned with pleasure; and Mrs. Stanton went on to explain that now that the money was found, she and Rolf might come again to Stanton Villa.

"May I tell Rolf now?" asked Jessie.

"I'll fetch him," said Augustus.

"Don't," objected Tom, "for you will be sure to frighten him."

"I only want to make friends with him," said Augustus, going slowly towards the motionless little figure near the tree. However, the moment Augustus approached Rolf drew back. Augustus quickened his pace, and Rolf began to run.

"Oh, don't let him chase him!" implored Jessie, clasping her hands.

"Run and stop him, Tom," cried Ada.

Tom rushed off, and caught his eldest brother by the coat.

"Let go!" shouted Augustus angrily; "I'm not going to hurt him."

"What's this hard thing?" cried Tom, feeling and pinching the back of his brother's coat. "Look, Gus, it is right at the back of your coat, between the lining and the cloth."

"What is it?"

The others advanced with Jessie, just as Augustus divested himself of his jacket, and felt the seam at the back.

"It feels awfully like the half-crown!" cried Tom excitedly. "Who has a knife or a pair of scissors?" Augustus soon produced the former, and cutting a few threads of the seam, out fell the missing coin!

"It is the very half-crown papa gave me!"

"There must have been a hole in your pocket," said Ada.

"Yes, there is a little one in the corner; it must have slipped round to the back when Grimes was brushing my coat."

"What is to be done with it now?"

"It is Rolf's," said Mrs. Stanton gently.

"I suppose it is," said Augustus hesitatingly.

"You spent his money," added his stepmother.

"Then he shall have it," answered Augustus.

"Don't try to catch him now, Gus; you only frighten him more. Jessie will give this to her brother, and tell him how it was found."

The little girl's eyes sparkled with delight. She ran after her brother, and the Stantons returned to their carriage.

"So I wronged the boy after all," said Augustus thoughtfully. "You were quite right, mamma; if I had not been in such a hurry to spend Rolf's money, I should have that half-crown now for myself."

"Mamma, you are not quick to think people wrong," said Ada.

"*Suspicion* is one of the King's enemies, and if harboured, even for a day, by a soldier of the cross, it is wonderful how much misery it has the power of inflicting on him."

"I shall never tolerate him even for an hour," said Augustus ; "he is a mean, shabby fellow. I wonder if Rolf will ever be less afraid of me ; it serves me right for being in such a fury with him for nothing."

Immediately on their return, the children flew off to tell every one about the discovery of the half-crown ; and Mrs. Stanton, finding a letter from her husband awaiting her return, retired to her room to enjoy its perusal in quiet, then, having made known its contents to Miss Stanton, she went to look for the children, and found them all collected under the horse-chestnut tree.

"A letter from papa," she said, holding it up.

"What does he say, mamma?"

"He seems to be quite well, and enjoys the voyage ; and what do you think he says about us?"

"Oh, what?"

"That we must all go to the sea-side for a few weeks this hot weather."

The message was received with rapturous applause.

"How soon shall we go?"

"When the holidays begin."

"Ours begin next Thursday," said Ada, "and the boys the following Monday."

"Is Aunt Charlotte going too?" asked Tom.

"Yes, it is chiefly for her sake that papa proposes it ; she finds this hot weather very oppressive here, and is quite as much pleased as you all can be at the prospect of change of air."

"Where do you think we shall go?"

"Papa mentions Brooksmouth. I will read you what he says about it."

And sitting down among them, she gave them copious extracts from the closely-written sheets.

"Every thing nice is happening to-day," said Ada gaily ; "the money found ; a letter from papa ; our all going to the sea."

"And Rolf and Jessie coming back," added Tom.

"Yes," said Mrs. Stanton seriously ; " I trust that not one of us will forget who sent it all, but remember heartily and joyfully to thank God for His many mercies."

"Many mercies!" cried Augustus. "M. M. Why the very letters ask for a story!"

"Then I must tell you one," said Mrs. Stanton, laughing, "and it shall be called—

Many Mercies.

"The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."—JAMES V. 11.

"Great crowds were assembled on the pier at St. Helliers. Every available spot was filled with people. The huge machine for lowering cargo into vessels was black with clinging individuals. Every heap of wood, every kerbstone along the jetty, had been secured and appropriated since the early part of the day. The long array of coal sacks, by José et Farrin's great warehouses, were long since covered with spectators, amongst whom sundry and various signs of impatience were manifested, as the several clocks in the town struck the hour of three.

"Two gaunt black poles were firmly fixed at each side of the harbour ; a thick rope extended from one to the other, and on this frail thread-like bridge the eyes of the multitude were fastened.

"‘Already late,’ said a dark, short man in French patois, looking down from his lofty perch on a lamp-post at the crowd of heads that swayed and surged beneath him ; ‘the tide will be low, and the passage dangerous.’

"‘It may be she waits for that,’ said a fat, pleasant-faced woman, looking up from below.

"‘Si, madame ; nothing more probable ; danger enhances the effect.’

"‘It is a difficult choice,’ returned the woman, somewhat sadly, ‘to be drowned, or to have all one’s bones broken!’

"‘Assuredly ; but she may fear neither the one nor the other. Tiens ! here she comes!’

"A little girl, in soft white clothing, and a wreath of artificial flowers, was lifted on the rope by a tall, dark man of forbidding aspect. A long pole was placed in her small trembling hands, and with an imperious gesture of his head, the man motioned her forward. She smiled on the spectators a cheerless, unchild-like smile, and bowed her head in acknowledgment of a murmur of applause; then fixing her eyes steadily on a faded tricolour that waved from the top of the opposite post, raised her little white-shod foot, and set forward. The ill-strained rope bent and swayed; the great poles at either end creaked ominously as with pointed toe and graceful bend she trod her dangerous way.

"The goal was reached; she paused for breath; she bowed, and smiled again in answer to the shouts of 'Bravo!' 'Bravissima!' 'Quelle enfant!' 'Merveilleuse!' that resounded on all sides; rested the heavy balance-rod for an instant on her knee, and set out on her return backwards. With slow, hesitating foot, she placed one behind the other till she arrived at the centre, when she stopped short, and knelt on one knee.

"'It is enough, O Miséricorde! it is more than enough!' exclaimed the stout old woman, clasping her hands as she glanced up at her neighbour on the lamp-post, but he was too busy watching to attend to her.

"The child's position was perilous in the extreme; the tide was now so low that as each rippling wave swept back it left bare the muddy seaweed-strewn beach.

"There was an intense breathless stillness among the vast crowd as the little creature lay flat on her back; then rising slowly, remained motionless for an instant; then pirouetted three times in the air, alighting after each leap in perfect safety. The people roared 'Encore!' 'Encore!' She seemed to glance wistfully to where the tall, dark man stood watching her closely. He re-echoed a deep hoarse 'Encore!' and, without a moment's pause, she leaped lightly upwards; but the ill-secured apparatus could not support the sharp descent. With a loud report, the

old black pole snapped asunder, and the child lay motionless in the frothy wavelets beneath.

“There was an awful pause. Then a quick rush forward. Two or three sailors were down in an instant, bending over the still inanimate figure. A few minutes afterwards she was laid on an empty sack on the top of the pier steps, surrounded by the compassionate awe-stricken faces of the crowd.

“‘Make way! she belongs to me!’ interposed a stern English voice; and the powerfully-built Englishman divided the gaping foreigners with one sweep of his strong arm, and bent over the child.

“‘Jess! I say, little Jess! Wake up, child!’

“The poor little thing opened her eyes with a wondering stare.

“‘Get up,’ he repeated imperiously; ‘get up this minute, or I’ll take the rod for you! D’ye hear me, girl?’

“‘Oh, that he is then detestable!’ exclaimed a little Frenchman, shrugging his high, square shoulders.

“The Englishman raised his dark stern eyes, and annihilated him with a glance.

“‘Here, child, give me your hand!’ He seized the little helpless fingers, and drew her up; but the spark of consciousness faded as he did so; and she relapsed into insensibility.

“The man looked round angrily.

“‘Is there no one to look to her in this outlandish place?’ he asked wrathfully. ‘Have you no doctors among you?’

“‘Monsieur le docteur comes,’ said the kind old woman before mentioned; ‘my son is gone to seek him.’

“The man folded his arms, and remained as motionless as the unconscious child, except for an impatient jerk of his foot from time to time, and a fierce glare around at every movement of the crowd.

“The doctor arrived in a few moments—a consequential little man, who prided himself much on his very broken English—and shook his head mightily over Jessie’s hopeless case.

“‘It is the spin,’ he said, after a hasty examination.

“The Englishman looked at him in contemptuous silence.

“‘The spin,’ repeated the little man, with his right forefinger placed longwise beside his hooked nose. ‘Vera sad, sire; leetle mees will nevare march again.’

“‘The spine!’ exclaimed the stranger, as a sudden light dawned on him; ‘couldn’t you say so at once, and have done with your chattering. There’s an hospital about here, is there not?’

“‘Si, si, l’hospitâl!’ echoed a dozen voices.

“But the little doctor, with a timid sidelong glance at the stalwart ‘Anglais,’ meekly suggested, rather than informed them all, that owing to the gas explosion that occurred the previous week ‘l’hospitâl’ was quite full.

“‘Then do as you like with her, all of you; I wash my hands of it; she is none of mine!’ and turning haughtily on his heel, the stranger walked away.

“The crowd gazed after his receding figure speechless and helpless for a moment, then all began to speak together with exceeding volubility, none listening to another, each one protesting *something* must be done at once, *some one* must take the little creature in, *some way* must be found to have her properly nursed and tended. But no one cared to make the offer themselves, till a pale, fair-haired little Englishwoman presented herself timidly before the doctor, and agreed to take care of the child. This timely aid was too acceptable to be rejected, and very shortly afterwards the deserted little girl was lying tranquilly on a bed in the deep recess in the kitchen wall, the little woman bustling about attending to the demands of the doctor, who was applying various restoratives to awake her once more to consciousness.

“It was long ere his efforts succeeded and he was able to take his leave, committing the little one to her new friend’s care, and promising to call in on the morrow. There was a long silence after he left; the large dark eyes of the child followed

every movement of her kind hostess as she moved softly to and fro, making sundry tempting preparations for tea. She did not address her little protégée till the meal was ready, then she carried a cup of hot tea, a fried egg, and a piece of buttered toast to the bedside.

“‘Come, my child, you must try to eat a little,’ she said in a low musical voice that fell soothingly on the child’s ear. But she answered nothing; and having been forbidden to attempt to sit up, was fed by spoonfuls in a reclining posture.

“The evening passed quietly away; the little doctor had cautioned her against exciting the invalid by talking, and she obeyed him literally. The little maiden did not seem at all inclined to be communicative; it was happiness enough for her to lie still and watch the quiet blue eyes, smooth fair hair, and busy fingers of her companion.

“The doctor called the next day, and seemed satisfied at the progress she had made: good food and perfect rest were doing their part towards restoration to health. He spoke hopefully, and permitted a little conversation in case it did not tire her, or excite her in any way. He had no sooner left the house than the child took advantage of his permission.

“‘Where’s Bill?’ was her first question.

“The colour deepened in the young woman’s cheeks; she shook her head, and said she did not know.

“‘Who are you?’

“‘I’m Betsey Thorpe, dear.’

“‘My name is Jessie Adams. When shall I be well again?’

“The young woman looked up with a tender, pitying glance, but made no reply.

“‘What’s the matter with me, Miss Betsey Thorpe; do’ee know?’

“‘I’m Mrs. Thorpe, dear. You’ve been and hurt your back somehow ——’

“‘My back!’ shrieked the child with a piercing scream. She struggled to raise herself and sit upright; but Mrs. Thorpe

was at her side in a moment, and laid her down with soothing words and caresses.

“Jessie burst into an agony of bitter weeping.

“‘That’s it,’ she sobbed. ‘That’s why Bill went away; I can bring him no money now. Oh!—oh, I wish I could die!’

“‘Hush, dear, hush; don’t say such a dreadful thing; you don’t mean it. Is he—is he—is that man your father?’

“‘No,’ sobbed the child drearily, ‘he ain’t nothing to me, nobody ain’t nothing to me. Oh, why don’t I die?’

“‘Because God is merciful, and spares your life——’

“‘I didn’t want it spared. I’d far sooner die, and be out of the world. Many and many a time when Bill would beat me I wished to die. I don’t see no good in living, ’tis such a mis’rable thing!’

“‘Poor child, poor little desolate thing! Do you know who put you into the world to live here, Jessie?’

“‘I do; ’twas God in heaven. That Bill’s always swearing about, but I’d rather He hadn’t. I was always a torment to Bill, and now I’ll be a bother to you. Oh, you’re good and kind, but you don’t know what it is to have your back broke; I do. Alice Cairn, she fell from the trapèze, and had a hump, and was so small till she died. ’Tisn’t like a leg or an arm, for ’twon’t mend. Oh, I can’t bear it!’

“‘Listen to me, little Jessie, and I shall tell you somewhat that will make you like to live, even if your back does not get well, which I earnestly hope it may. The great God our Father, who lives up above the blue sky, He put you here into the world to live here for a bit: do you know why?’

“‘To get money for Bill.’

“‘Not only that, Jessie; it was that you should be a little soldier of His; you know what that is, don’t you?’

“‘Ay, with a red coat and a sword.’

“‘Yes; and what is a soldier’s duty?’ asked Mrs. Thorpe, taking up her work.

“‘They fights.’

“‘Yes, they fight battles, and defend our country, and don’t let enemies take it from us.’

“‘I can’t fight without my back,’ said Jessie, beginning to sob.

“‘Yes, you can fight there, just as you are, lying on the bed.’

“‘There is no one to fight with but you, and I don’t want to do that.’

“‘No, indeed ; but you can fight with the naughty words and thoughts that come into your head. You can say to yourself, ‘I have had a sorrowful life, and now have to lie here unable to move ; but I will bear it all patiently, because God sent it ; and He loves me, and has given me many mercies !’

“‘Many mercies !’ echoed Jessie, with a shrill laugh ; ‘where bees they, I’d like to know ?’

“‘I couldn’t reckon them to you, Jessie,’ said Mrs. Thorpe gravely, ‘they are so *very* many.’

“‘Well, that beats all !’ said Jessie, smiling at her. ‘I can’t for the life of me see one.’

“‘Is it no mercy to be lying warm, fed, and sheltered in a comfortable bed, instead of cold, starved, and neglected on the stones by the harbour ?’

“‘That was *you*,’ said Jessie, gratefully, ‘and I loves you for it ; you mayn’t think so, for I never said nothing, but I do.’

“The earnest manner and faltering voice could not be misunderstood. Mrs. Thorpe bent forward and kissed her little charge.

“‘’Twasn’t *me*, Jess, it was God,’ she said solemnly. ‘When the doctor asked who’d take you home with ’em, no one spoke a word. It wasn’t that I didn’t *want* to take you, dear ; it was just the thought I *could* do it never came into my head. Well, there was a long spell of talking then, and a little voice, not of any of ’em on the pier, but inside in my heart, seemed to whisper, “I was hungry, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink. . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me ;” they were my

Saviour's own words, and I couldn't withstand 'em, but came forward instant, and says as I'll have you.'

" 'Why did He want you to have me?'

" 'Because He loved you, Jessie child, and couldn't abear to have aught He loved lying out there cold and lonely, perhaps even to die, and fall a prey to His enemy.'

" 'Loved *me*? ' echoed the little one, looking enquiringly at the sky, as though expecting an answer from it; 'tell me more about Him.'

" Mrs. Thorpe complied, and described in simple language the everlasting love that had planned and carried out the wondrous work of the redemption of mankind. Her auditor listened attentively, anxiously, and drank in the life-giving story with thirsting avidity. To be loved, to be watched over, to be cared for, was a wondrous marvel to the homeless, lonely little creature. She gladly accepted the salvation so dearly purchased for her, and in simple, childlike faith, and newly-awakened gratitude, came to Jesus just as she was, weary, and worn, and sad, and casting her burden of sin and sorrow at His sacred feet, found in Him an eternal resting-place.

" Time passed swiftly away, and Jessie progressed day by day, not only in body, but also in mind. She could read a little, and lay patiently in the required attitude, learning hymns and verses for her good benefactress. A deep, warm tide of love had sprung up between them; but Mrs. Thorpe was often astonished by the glowing personal love and gratitude the little girl evinced towards God. The great surprise it had been to her, when first told that through all the sin and sorrow of her early life God her Father had loved and guarded her, was still ever present with her, and time seemed only to increase the impression it had made, and intensify her return of deep affection.

" As soon as it was possible to leave her for a few hours, Mrs. Thorpe, at her earnest request, went to make enquiries about the Englishman who had disappeared so suddenly from the

scene. For several weeks her enquiries were in vain. But one day, nearly a month after Jessie's accident, she heard that a man answering her description had taken a steerage passage in a steamer that was to sail for America on the following day. Jessie had but little doubt it was he, and lay trembling with anxiety while she was away, starting at every sound, till at last the door opened, and Mrs. Thorpe entered. Jessie perceived at once that her eyes were red with weeping.

"'Jessie, my child,' she said, stooping to kiss the little maiden, who to-day had left her bed for the first time, and was lying on the old horse-hair sofa by the fire, 'I've seen him; he is gone. I waited till the ship turned the lighthouse, and was off, nigh out of sight. He has given you to me, little one; you shall be my little girl, and call me Aunt Betsey.'

"Jessie's eyes sparkled with joy.

"'Oh, Aunt Betsey!' she exclaimed readily, 'I am so, *so* glad. I wish I could do something for you. You ain't sorry, are you?' she asked, the bright smile fading as she glanced at her kind friend's swollen eyelids.

"'Sorry!' she repeated with another fond embrace. 'I don't know what I should do without my little girl. 'Tisn't *that* that grieved me, dear; 'twas poor William. We must both pray for him, Jess.'

"'William!' said Jessie with a sigh. I didn't know Bill had a long name.'

"'Jessie,' said the young woman gravely, when she had removed her walking things, and sat down by the fire in a clean starched apron and snowy widow's cap, 'how did you come to know him?'

"'He was father's friend. Father was took ill, and they all said he'd ha' got well if he had taken care of himself; but he'd do nothing, and would be on the stage every night just the same, and it killed him in the end. He had taught me rope dancing, and some acting too; and people used to shout so when I'd come on the stage, and take so many tickets, Bill

said he could make a good thing out of me, and asked father to give me to him; but father wanted to send me to his sister that was married somewhere, and gathered all the money he could; but when he died Bill took the money, and kept me too for himself.'

"Mrs. Thorpe's eyes were full of tears as Jessie paused.

" 'I'm that sister, Jessie dear!' she said; 'my name was Adams. I am your own father's sister. I knew Bill on the jetty the moment I saw him; he was an old sweetheart of mine long ago, before I met Mr. Thorpe; but he went to the bad, and drew my poor brother along with him. So father and mother said I must just put him out of my head, and not give him another thought; and then I met John Thorpe, a good, honest man he was, and the squire got him a first-rate situation over here; and since I left England I've heard nothing of my poor brother, and knew not whether he were dead or alive.'

"Jessie lay back watching the fire, her little face beaming with happiness. 'My real own auntie! father's own sister!' she murmured to herself. 'Oh, Aunt Betsey, this is another of His many, *many* mercies! Help me to thank God for it.'"





CHAPTER XIV.

ON BOARD.

Not your Own.

NE bright afternoon, early in August, a little steamer was ploughing its way against a strong westerly breeze that beat up the Channel, cutting her way bravely through the choppy sea, in defiance of the white-crested waves that broke heavily upon her bows.

Augustus Stanton stood alone on the promenade deck, all the other passengers having sought shelter below. He held his straw hat in his hand, and, with his curly hair blowing wildly about, was making involuntary grimaces at the showers of salt spray brought up to him by every gust of wind.

“Augustus!”

Ada’s authoritative voice came shrilly from the deck beneath. He leant over the railing.

“What now?”

“You are to come down at once.”

“Who said so?”

“It does not matter to you who said it; come down instantly!”

“It matters greatly to me who said it,” returned Augustus, imitating Ada’s consequential tones; “and I shall not come down till I know.”

Ada tossed her head indignantly, and walked away.

Augustus whistled loudly, to show how little he cared for her interference or annoyance; but the little vessel giving a great

lurch at the same moment, he was nearly precipitated into the sea, and thinking better of it, he slowly descended to the lower deck, where Ada was sitting alone, sheltered by a large sail the sailors had put up to protect the passengers from the surf. She was comfortably rolled up in a warm shawl of Mrs. Stanton's, and a gleam of triumph shone in her blue eyes as Augustus made his appearance.

"I say, was it mamma who sent you to call me down?"

"No."

"Who rolled you up in that fashion? You look like a magnified sausage."

"Mamma did, I was so cold; she is gone down with Aunt Charlotte to the cabin."

"What? that stuffy little hole we peeped into when we came on board! how can she bear to stay there? You might go down and take her place for a while."

"Indeed I shall do no such thing, I should be ill directly!"

"I thought you had taken it into your head to be good, at least I imagined that to be the reason of the change that has come over you for the last week."

"Did you think me much changed?" asked Ada gravely.

"Yes; and not entirely for the better either. I think it is very shabby of you, considering we both arranged that, whatever the little ones might do, *we* should hold out for freedom, and fight for it."

"I dare say *you* don't think me changed for the better," said Ada, with great solemnity of face and manner, "because you are still warring on the wrong side, and therefore can't understand me; but when once you have enlisted in the right cause, you will begin to comprehend and appreciate what is right and good."

"Those are fine long words—'comprehend and appreciate.' I 'suppose, what is right and good' means simply your own self? Well, I had rather be wicked as I am, than conceited as you are."

"Conceited!" echoed Ada angrily; but she checked herself, and added with a martyr-like air, "Soldiers of the cross are sure to be maligned and misunderstood by the world."

Augustus burst out laughing.

Ada looked deeply offended, and there followed a short silence.

Soon Mrs. Stanton emerged from the door leading down to the cabin; she looked pale and weary, but smiled as she saw the two children.

"Were not the sailors good-natured, mamma, to have this great sail hung between us and the sea," said Ada.

"Very kind indeed," answered Mrs. Stanton, sitting down beside them. "Dear Aunt Charlotte is quietly asleep now. I was a little anxious about her; this is a long journey for a person of her age. Where is the rest of my little flock?"

"Looking down into the engines," said Ada. "Tom is so fond of machinery, he would not come away. I tried to stay with them, as you told me, mamma, but the smell of hot oil was so nasty, I could not bear it!"

Mrs. Stanton made no reply, but went in search of the little truants.

"I say," began Augustus mischievously, "if I were once enlisted on the good side, Ada, I shouldn't have been disobedient to mamma, because obeying her entailed a little disagreeability like hot oil!"

"If you were on the good side," retorted Ada, "you would not say things that you know to be much more disagreeable to me than even hot oil!"

"I give you ample opportunity to exercise the graces of patience and Christian endurance; but you don't seem to seize on them, and use them as you ought."

"You are turning all the wicked arms against me that we had prepared to wield against mamma—the sword of *Hate*, the helmet of *Disobedience*, the rifle of *Rudeness*, and the shield of *Defiance*."

"Well, it serves you right for ever using them against anyone so gentle and really good as she is."

"You used them yourself."

"Well, if I did, I am ashamed and sorry for it."

"What an admission from ——"

"All collected at last," said Mrs. Stanton's pleasant voice, as she came up, unperceived, with the three younger ones. "Now, let us unfasten this bundle of cloaks, and make ourselves comfortable. Tom, there is a cosy little seat next Ada for you; sit close to me Katie, you shall have part of my cloak; little Alfie shall come on my lap; here, Gus dear, is a sheltered nook for you."

"I am going upon the promenade deck again," said Augustus; "I don't want to be cuddled up here."

"I hear it is scarcely safe to go up there in such a sea; one of the gentlemen passengers had a severe fall a little while ago."

"What a fool he must have been!"

"I had rather you did not go, Gus."

"Now for the Helmet of Disobedience," said Ada in an under tone.

Augustus' cheek flushed.

"I mean to hold on by the rails."

"Mamma said you are not to go," said Ada aloud.

Her brother's eyes flashed.

"It is no business of yours, Ada," he answered rudely. "As far as you are concerned, I should just go up or stay down, as I chose. I am my own master."

"Are you, Gus?" asked Mrs. Stanton, raising her quiet eyes to his face.

Augustus kicked about a little black bag of Ada's that lay at his feet, but did not answer a word.

Ada picked it up indignantly.

"You are always in mischief," she sighed, with a reproving shake of her long curls.

Alfred raised his head from its resting-place on his step-

mother's shoulder; his little round face was framed by the crimson shawl, and a few light, soft locks that peeped out over his forehead were blown upright by the wind.

"Gus," he said gravely, "please don't go; perhaps in a little while, if you stay, mamma may tell us a story."

Katie slipped her soft hand into his to second Alfie's request, and Augustus, submitting moodily, threw himself into a seat.

Ada lay back against the great flapping sail and closed her eyes, Tom and Katie disposed themselves to sleep, and Mrs. Stanton and Alfred kept up a low-toned conversation together. For a while Augustus felt too much out of temper to care to listen to what they were saying, till at length there was some mention of the letter they had received that morning from their father, then Gus became interested, and roused himself to attend.

"Dear mamma," Alfred was saying, "I cannot get that delightful letter we had from papa out of my thoughts for a moment. Katie and Tom and I have been talking so much about it! It will be such joy to see him again! But you won't stop telling us your little stories, will you? I am longing to hear the rest of them, from N to Z.

"No, Alfie, we shall not give them up. Perhaps dear papa is on his way to us; but even if he were, he could not possibly be home for nearly a month."

"That is a long time to wait; but I am so very glad that the English won the battle. They always do, don't they, mamma? Is it not nice papa being a soldier, and so brave! It makes me long to be a man when I hear his letters."

Mrs. Stanton smiled, and stroked down the flying locks that escaped from the warm shawl.

"I'll tell you what, mamma," said Alfred gravely, after a short pause, "I do believe that one reason why I long to be a man is, because then I shall be able to do just what I like. Don't look like that, mamma; for indeed I like obeying you always—I mean sometimes—at least generally; but the other

day I was looking at Rolf helping the gardener to pot all those Tom Thumb geraniums, and you opened the drawing-room window, and beckoned to me to come in—and, mamma, I was wrong—but I made such an ugly face when I heard your voice calling to me, and the gardener looked up at me just in time to see it, and he laughed, and said, ‘Ah, young sir, you won’t be sorry when the time comes that you are your own master ;’ and—and—I thought he was right.’

Mrs. Stanton looked earnestly into the blushing, ingenuous countenance raised half enquiringly to hers, and asked,

“When do you expect to be your own master, Alfie?”

“When I am tall, and getting a black moustache on my lip, like papa.”

“Then you think papa is his own master?”

“Of course, mamma.”

“Well, Alfie, shall I surprise you very much when I tell you that he is not his own ; and there is nothing dear papa would repeat to you more gladly and thankfully, were he here.”

Alfred seemed disappointed.

“Whose is he then?” he asked, looking very crestfallen.

“He and all who believe and love our dear Saviour Jesus Christ are bought with a price, and all that they are and have are His, to be used in His service as long as they live.”

“And I too, mamma?”

“I trust so ; I believe so, my child.”

Alfred relapsed into deep thought. He slowly raised both his hands, and looked first at the palms, then at the backs, as he gravely enquired,

“Everything I have ?—my hands too?”

“Do you grudge them, Alfie?”

“N—o, mamma.”

“That is a doubtful *no*, my darling ; but can you think for a moment of all your Saviour has done, and suffered for you, and withhold even your little hands from His service? Think of the scourging and buffeting ; the cruel crown of sharp thorns ;

and, above all, the deep, mysterious agony of the cross ; and remember it was all for you ; all endured for love to lost sinners, because those little hands touched what they ought not, those feet wandered into sin ; and He so loved and yearned for His little lost lambs, that He gave Himself a willing sacrifice to redeem them from eternal death, and open the door of His beautiful dwelling above, that by-and-by they may enter in, and be with Him in glory for ever."

"Oh, mamma, mamma, I like—I long to give them ! Only tell me how ?"

"You must glorify God with them, Alfie, remembering He sees when you use them, and that they are not your own, only a trust to keep for Him, and therefore to be used with all your might. If certain little girls and boys that I know remembered this, their masters would never have to reprove them for neglected tasks, ill-written copies, and blotted exercises, nor mamma grieve over pieces of mischief done by idle little fingers."

Alfred looked reproachfully at both his little plump hands, and nodded his head sagely.

"And my eyes, too, mamma ?" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Neither are your eyes your own ; so they must not be used as your naughty heart dictates, but to be consecrated or made holy for the service of your dear Lord. They must not look with favour on any wicked thing, or give a mocking glance at the failings of others, or a cold gaze at the sorrow of others, but as a clear quiet lake reflects the transparent blue of the heavens above, so the glorious reflection of their Master's love must shine and glow in their depths."

"And my ears ?"

"Your ears also are not your own, and therefore must be deaf to all temptations to evil, and ever open to hear your Lord's message of peace or warning, and always ready to listen to the cry of those in need or distress. Then, Alfie, your mouth should be opened with wisdom, to speak gentle, respectful

words, and on your tongue should be the law of kindness. Your little feet should be ready to run the way of God's commandments, shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, never slothful or lazy, but diligent and active to fulfil all the duties unto which God has called you. But, dear Alfie, there is something else that must be given to God first of all, or all that hands, eyes, ears, mouth, and feet can do will fail to please Him. What do you think that most important thing is?"

Alfred thought for a long time before he said softly, "My heart."

"Yes, your whole heart; the more readily and entirely the heart is given to God, the more acceptably and zealously all your members will be employed in His service. What would you think of a person who was perpetually turning round the hands of a clock to try to make it keep the right hour, and though the key was by him, neglected to wind it up? It is in just the same way that the heart is the mainspring by which all the works move, and God's holy Spirit is the key that sets them all in motion. Every one that is brought into Christ's Church by baptism has the key by him, but all do not use it. There are still two other precious gifts to be used to God, Alfie. What are they?"

"I don't know, mamma," said Alfred musingly.

"You are making use of both now," said his stepmother, smiling.

"Thought, is it?"

"Yes; your intellect is a most precious gift of God; and we are told in the Bible to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring every thought into the obedience of Christ."

"But, mamma, you said *two*; what is the other?"

"The other is *time*, of which we shall never know the true value till we enter upon eternity, Alfie. I shall now tell you a little story about my own dear cousin, who died years and years ago, and as our next letter in the alphabet is *N*, 'Not your

Own' will be a very applicable name for my story ; for at that time those three words made a deep impression on my mind that will never be effaced."

"I am so glad you mean to finish your little tales, mamma; and it will be delightful to hear about your very own cousin, a real live man. What was his name, mamma?"

"He died when I was quite a little girl, Alfie ; his name does not matter. I shall call him *Nelson* in my story. When my father died ——"

"Mamma, it seems so funny your having a papa as well as me."

"My papa, Alfie, was like yours, an officer ; but he was cut off in youth, health, and strength when I was quite a child."

"Is Gus awake? He will like to hear the story."

"I am," said Augustus. "I have been listening all the time."

"So have I," added Ada.

Katie opened her sleepy eyes, and Tom gave a drowsy grunt to show that he was awake, and Mrs. Stanton began

Not your Own.

"Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price : therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."—1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

"My cousin was an orphan, and quite grown up when he came to live with us ; but shortly after my dear father's death, while my brother Theodore was at school, he made some new acquaintances, who led him into what was wrong ; and evening after evening he was out, we knew not where, and seldom returned before morning. But I must also tell you of old Marston, a dear faithful old servant of my father's, who loved us all dearly. He had been a soldier, and had saved my father's life in battle when they were both young men. Well, as you may suppose, this aged servant grieved as much as we did about my poor cousin ; and one night, as Nelson came

running downstairs on his way out, the drawing-room door was open, and I could see and hear all that passed. I remember every word as though it had been but yesterday. Marston came out of the pantry, and Nelson sent him for a hansom. When he came back he brought his young master his great coat, still without speaking a word; but as he put it on it seemed to him he was helping him on his evil course, and the old man could keep silence no longer.

“‘Ah, sir,’ he said, ‘it was an ill day for this house when Mr. Haddon came and took you out o’ nights.’

“‘Bosh, Marston!’ he retorted. ‘I daresay you were just the same yourself before you sowed your wild oats, and became such a tower of propriety and respectability.’

“‘I was, sir, I was; and I have lived to repent it bitterly.’

“‘Well,’ said my cousin, laughing, ‘when I have followed my inclinations for a while, I mean to turn over a new leaf, as well as you and everyone else.’

“‘Easy to say, sir, ’tis easy to *say* ;’ and Marston shook his grey head, and sighed deeply.

“Nelson busied himself buttoning the thick surtout carefully across his chest, and took up his hat and gloves.

“‘Mr. Nelson,’ said our old servant at last, as he opened the hall door with a slow, reluctant hand, ‘you are forgetting one thing.’

“‘What is that?’

“‘Ah, sir, you forget you are not your own.’

“‘Whose am I then?’ asked Nelson carelessly; and without giving him time to reply, he ran down the steps, gave an address to the driver, stepped into the vehicle, and was whirled away.

“‘There’s as fine a young soldier as ever drew a sword lost to the Lord’s army, and deserting to the enemy,’ said Marston half aloud as he closed the door. ‘May the Saviour who bought his soul at such a priceless sacrifice recall him to his ranks before ’tis too late.’

“And this old veteran retired to his pantry, I have no doubt, to meditate and pray as he finished his work.

“Days and weeks sped on, and matters continued just as they were.

“At length early spring was bringing, even to the great city of London, its bright promise of sunshine and warmth, and the bare network of the leafless trees became interspersed with tender green shoots.

“One bright moonlight night Nelson was out as usual. One after another the first morning hours tolled out in the silence, and I lay on the sofa in my room, still in my evening dress, feeling far too sad and anxious about him to go to bed. I waited patiently for his arrival; but he came not, and I was beginning to get drowsy, when the sound of many footsteps roused me suddenly. Nelson had returned; and, too sleepy to rise and undress, I drew a shawl over me, and lay back with a sensation of relief. However, a few minutes afterwards I was again disturbed by the sound of whispering outside my door. In one moment I was on my feet, and opening it, I peeped out. Marston and a person I did not know were standing talking together in the full flood of white moonbeams that poured in from the staircase window. I came forward, and asked him what was the matter. He was so startled at seeing me that he did not answer for a moment; then he tried to parry my question; but at last I extorted the terrible truth. Nelson had quarrelled with another gentleman at the friend's house at which he had been spending the evening, and had received a shot in the side that was likely to prove fatal. I went at once to my mother's room. It was empty. There were voices and lights in the dining-room; so I hurried downstairs, and went in.

“There on the sofa, pale as death, and quite insensible, lay my dear cousin. My poor mother sat by the fire weeping. I knelt down on the rug beside her, and throughout that long weary night neither of us spoke to the other; but all the while our hearts were engaged in speaking to God, praying Him to

have mercy, and spare him we both loved so dearly. Marston and the doctor watched beside the sofa; but there was not a sound or movement all the night through.

"My dear mother had never recovered the shock of my father's death. This second overwhelming trial was one drop too much in her cup of sorrow. As the day dawned she became very ill, and was obliged to return to her room to lie down. I went with her, and watched beside her till she slept, and then stole away to the terrible stillness that reigned in the room below.

"When I came in Nelson's feeble voice broke on my ear. He was speaking to Marston. I was such a child at the time, neither heeded me as I crept in, but continued the conversation.

"Does he say I shall recover?' proceeded Nelson's weak, hoarse tones. 'Can't you tell me plainly, Marston, and have done with it!'

"Dear sir, 'tis hard to tell.'

"Then you needn't,' he interrupted, with suffering impatience; 'for I know.'

"Then followed a painful silence. He moaned once or twice, took the spoonful of some restorative medicine Marston held to his lips, and then seemed to revive.

"Marston,' he said suddenly, 'do you remember a question I asked you some time ago that never had a reply?'

"Surely, sir,' returned the old man sadly, 'you never asked aught of me that did not have an answer.'

"I left no time for an answer,' said poor Nelson, moving restlessly; 'but it has haunted me ever since. The words have burned like a hot iron into my heart. You said that I forgot I was not my own, and I asked, "Whose am I?" If I am not my own, whose am I? Oh, it's an awful question!' and he shuddered violently.

"Ye are not your own,' murmured the old man softly; 'for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

“‘I am not His! I know it—I feel it. Nor am I yet mine own. I have no control—no power. Marston, can it be? Good heavens, do I belong to His enemy?’

“‘God forbid, sir; but even if you do, dear Master Nelson, you need be His foe no longer. Think of the price the Saviour has paid to buy you back—His own life-blood! and that now, even *now*, at the very last moment, He is ready and willing to receive you. None ever came to Him, and was sent empty away.’ He paused.

“‘Go on,’ said Nelson eagerly; ‘the time is so short—so very, awfully short! Pray Him to spare me a few minutes longer till I know——’

“I knelt with Marston while he prayed aloud, the tears chasing each other down his aged cheeks.

“Then he rose, and spoke again.

“‘Only believe in Him, dear young master; cling to Him, trust in Him. His love is great enough, strong enough, ready enough. Remember the prodigal son, remember the welcome he got; when he was yet a *great way off* his Father saw him. Oh, my dear sir, take courage and look up; pray to Him *now*, from the depths of your repentant heart. It is not too late; He will never, never turn away. “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”’

“Nelson closed his eyes; his lips moved rapidly. The exertion caused a flush of colour to come to his cheeks; it mounted to his brow. An instant afterwards the intelligent light on his face died away, and again he was quite unconscious.

“About half-an-hour later the restoratives applied were successful, and the failing senses gradually returned. The clergyman arrived, and after a long interview, we were sent for to take leave of him.

“My mother bent down to kiss him, and I ventured to follow her example. As I did so he clasped my hand in his, and looked at me very earnestly.

“‘Little Minnie,’ he whispered, for his voice was well-nigh

gone, 'be warned by me not to put off coming to Jesus. Come *now, now*; remember you are not your own!'

"The long sentences and great agitation was too much for him; he lay back with closed eyes, breathing heavily.

"Once more he opened them again.

"'I cling to the Rock of Ages,' he said faintly. "'Lord, save me, or I perish!'"

"They were his last words; with one deep, long-drawn sigh he was gone.

"There was no joy of assured faith, no foretaste of heavenly bliss in this untimely ending of a misspent life; and yet we had solid ground for hope, and rejoiced in it; for while our blessed Redeemer walked this sin-laden earth none ever cried to Him and was rejected, and that same Jesus is with us still. But through what agony of mind, what bitter remorse, shone the glimmering light at last!

"Ah! he had long cast from him the thought that he was not his own; he would none of His gracious Master's service; and he reaped a terrible retribution in the hour of death and danger, by having no sure foundation to rest upon.

"There is but one example of a late repentance recorded in the New Testament: that, though we may hope for such, yet we must not trust to that fearful hour to seek the Saviour. Rather let us, walking hand in hand with Him in life, be able to say with the Psalmist, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.'"





CHAPTER XV.

BROOKSMOUTH.

Only a Fragment.

“H, mamma, mamma!” cried Alfred, skipping along the shore from rock to rock, a day or two after their arrival at Brooksmouth, “we have found ever so many queer things; do come and see the quantities of mussels that are sticking to the rocks over there; sticking so fast, Gus and Tom can’t pick them off.”

Mrs. Stanton looked up from the book she was reading out to Aunt Charlotte, who, reclining against a sloping rock, well covered with furs and cloaks, looked brighter and better than she had done lately.

“Bring me some to look at, my dear,” she said in her weak, tremulous tones.

And Alfred rushed off, returning in a few minutes with all the children, each of whom had some treasure of the deep to display. Mrs. Stanton laid aside the book to answer their many questions, and admire their curiosities.

“Look, mamma! did you ever see such a lovely little bit of sea-weed, bright rose-colour, and so beautifully cut? When it was floating in the little pool where I found it, it looked like a tree in winter, only such a lovely colour, and so exquisitely minute.”

“Aunt Charlotte, is not this white stone just like a turnip, with a bit of green sticking out of the top?”

"I have discovered five cowries in the sand ; if I can find enough Ada shall have a bracelet of them."

"Mamma," said Ada, "do speak to Alfie, he has got his feet wet, and Gus frightens one so. He goes to the very edge of the rocks, and even leans over."

"Oh, Alfie must not have his feet wet ; he was coughing last night. Ada dear, will you take him home to nurse, and have his stockings changed ?"

"Indeed, mamma, he can very well go by himself ; it is not far, and it serves him right too ; for when I expressly told him not to get wet, he dipped one of his feet into a little pond, just on purpose to tease me."

"I'm not surprised," remarked Augustus ; "the way you order people not to do this and that, Ada, makes one long to do it."

"*You* need not find fault, Gus. If mamma had only seen you hanging over the edge of that precipice to gather samphire, she would have been terrified. Come, Alf, you naughty boy ; I hope you are sorry for all the trouble you are giving me."

She walked off with the child as she spoke ; and Mrs. Stanton glanced at Gus.

"I see I need not speak," she said smiling ; "you will try not to go into danger again."

"Yes, mamma," he answered, looking frankly into her quiet, trustful face. "I knew it was wrong at the time ; for my head felt quite giddy."

"It not only endangers your own life, but shows a bad example to the others ; and if I did not rely on you and Ada to be good and steady, I should always feel anxious when you were out of my sight."

"You need not, mamma," he answered reassuringly ; and they all sat down to watch the graceful little pleasure-steamers cutting their way through the rough waves, and white-sailed yachts flitting hither and thither in the sunshine.

At length Ada and Alfred returned ; the latter with a troubled expression on his usually bright little face.

"Have you been lecturing Alfie all the way there and all the way back?" asked Augustus.

Ada did not deign a reply.

"It is a good thing that Ada helps a little to keep you all in order," said Aunt Charlotte, shaking her head at him till her spectacles dropped off.

Augustus laughed rudely as she polished the glasses and replaced them; and looking round, he met Mrs. Stanton's reproachful eyes, and coloured a little as he turned his head away.

"I like to help mamma," said Ada loftily; "but I still more like to serve faithfully in the great army of the King."

"That's right, my dear," said her grandaunt. "It is wonderful to me to see how much you are all altered for the better. Your way of managing them surprises me," she added, addressing Mrs. Stanton. You seem to say so little. I can't make out how you have such influence."

"Mamma does not manage us by scolding and ordering every one about as Ada does," said Augustus.

"No," said Tom thoughtfully; "she just leads us to the great Captain, and lets Him direct us and make us good children to her and to everyone else."

"I should not scold or order you, Gus," said Ada in an injured tone, "if you only tried in the very least to be good, but you set yourself obstinately against it."

"If I do, it is *you* who make me."

"Oh, how can you say anything so terribly, so frightfully untrue, as that I am to be blamed for your naughtiness!"

"I do say it; you goad me on, you know you do, and then you pretend to sigh and groan—glorying all the while in being so much better and holier than anyone else! Come, children, let's build a fortification."

They all set to work at once except Ada, who burst into tears.

"Mamma, is he not unkind and untruthful to accuse me falsely?"

Mrs. Stanton drew the little girl kindly towards her.

"Is it *all* untrue, Ada dear?" she asked softly.

Ada sobbed, but did not answer.

"Dear child, I sometimes almost fear that when you came to enlist under our Prince's banner you did not throw away *all* beside, but that you kept just a little piece of your own garment of righteousness when you came to put on the glorious clothing and holy armour worn by the soldiers of His army."

"You think me proud and stuck-up," said Ada, weeping bitterly, "and so do they all. Everyone is against me!"

"One is not, Ada, unless it be that you are against Him."

"I want to be on His side," said Ada, in a softened tone.

"Wholly and entirely?"

"Yes, mamma. You don't think me insincere as well as everything else, do you?"

"No, dear child; I think you earnestly wish to do right, and serve your great Master faithfully; but we must remember, Ada, that on our breast-plate there must be the reflection of *His* righteousness, not our own, which would only sully and dim its brightness, and so loosen this valuable piece of armour from its place, that our foes could easily strike us with their poisoned darts, and even wound us mortally."

"But, mamma, surely we must *ourselves* try to be good?"

"Yes; we must *ourselves* try to be good; but not try *by* ourselves to do anything that is good. We must not, as it were, shut up our hearts in darkness, and then light a little candle of good works to brighten it up, but throw open every door and window to the blessed influence of the Sun of Righteousness, and let *His* light shine inside and illumine and beautify every corner of it. Let us not try to put on the whole armour of God with a little hidden piece of the 'filthy rags' of our own righteousness underneath; but casting every fragment of it away, let us yield ourselves wholly to His service, to be nothing, to have nothing, but the fulness that is in Him."

Ada looked very grave and thoughtful, but did not speak.

"Shall I tell you all a story to illustrate what I mean?"

"Oh, do mamma! Children, come—a story!"

"It must begin with O," said Alfred.

"So it must. I shall call it

Only a Fragment.

"And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus."—MARK x. 50.

"'Casting away his garment,' that was what Oliver Leighton did not do. When he rose and came to Jesus, he yielded a part of the old, torn, soiled robe willingly enough; but there were one or two fragments still retained by him, and they clung so fast around him, and from long habit sat so easily on him, it was hard, very hard to relinquish them entirely. So he grasped the bright armour he admired and valued, and tried to clasp its glittering pieces over the hidden fragment, and persuade himself that all was well. But how ill it fitted! how loosely the two-edged sword hung to his side! The girdle of truth was fain to break in the effort to make it meet around him; the shield of faith turned round on his arm, and dropped to the ground in the conflict; the helmet also pained him without the pure white robe beneath for its fine edges to rest upon; the gleaming breast-plate was dull and defiled; the shoes impeded him as he walked.

"This mental discomfort, this bitterness of spirit, was caused by his constant effort to combine self-pleasing and self-righteousness with the humble self-denying service of his Master.

"All men spoke well of Oliver Leighton, the fatherless boy, who, at the early age of sixteen, had tried to take up the burden laid down by his father, and worked hard to supply his invalid mother and little brothers and sisters with all their accustomed comforts.

"The book-shop was as well arranged; orders as punctually attended to as ever; early and late the tall, handsome youth toiled and laboured at his business, and parents pointed him out as a model of steadiness and piety to their own wild sons.

The clergy of his small native town smiled approvingly as they passed his Sunday-school class, and never missed him from the old-fashioned square pew in the church, or failed to hear his voice in the singing and responses. Everyone praised the youth, and many let their respect and admiration be known to himself by look and manner, and often even by words.

“He received this homage with modest self-depreciation, but none the less did the brazen bands of flattery bind and fasten the old garment round him, till he felt that parting with this little fragment would be equivalent to the loss of the right hand or eye.

“Thus he was esteemed by the townsfolk in a manner highly gratifying to his youth and inexperience, and was the chief prop and support of his own family.

“Let us peep into the comfortable parlour behind the shop, where the fire burns so cheerily. The invalid’s couch is drawn near to the table, while a little girl is making toast in preparation for the evening meal.

“‘Have not the children come from school yet, Alice?’ asked Mrs. Leighton presently.

“‘No, mother, it is not time yet,’ answered the little girl.

“As she raised her head to reply one could see that her face was old for so small and slight a figure; a pale, quiet-looking girl, about fourteen years of age, with a meek, patient, somewhat timid air.

“‘I wish Oliver would soon come in,’ said Mrs. Leighton plaintively; ‘the day has been so long and lonely. Look out, Alice, and see whether he has any customers now.’

“‘No, mother,’ said the girl, after glancing through the muslin-curtained glass door. ‘Oliver is writing in his books; I daresay he will come soon.’

“Her surmise proved correct. Oliver presently appeared, kissed his mother affectionately, and sat down with her to tea, while his sister made toast for both.

“‘I want to speak seriously to you, Alice,’ he said, looking severely at her downcast face. ‘Mr. Parsons was here to-day,

and asked me why you were so often absent from Sunday-school. Tell me why it is?’

“‘I have not time to go in the morning,’ she answered blushing, ‘and—and ——’

“‘The old fault, Alice; I suppose you did not learn your catechism?’

“‘I couldn’t,’ pleaded Alice, her lips quivering slightly; ‘I try and try, but can’t remember a word; even when I think I know it, it goes out of my head when I have to say it before so many, and—and the girls laugh so ——’

“Oliver and his mother exchanged glances; the former shrugged his shoulders, a suggestive movement not lost upon Alice’s sensitive feelings, as she came forward to place a slice of hot toast on his plate, and murmured with sad humility, ‘I know I am not clever, dear Oliver, that is the reason why I asked you to allow me to leave school altogether, and to let Ellie go instead. It is only a useless expense sending me; but indeed, if you wish it, I shall try again to learn my catechism, and not to mind being laughed at.’

“‘It is not *my* wishes, Alice,’ still in a stern admonitory tone, ‘it is what is right.’

“‘Yes, Alice,’ interrupted her mother, ‘you must not only think of pleasing yourself. Look how well and unselfishly Oliver works for us all!’

“A gratified gleam brightened Oliver’s eye; how very pleasant it was to be reminded of his piety and goodness! Poor misguided soldier! The bright armour hung more insecurely than ever as he gazed complacently on the ‘filthy rags’ of his own poor efforts to attain to holiness, and drew the soiled fragment closer round him, instead of casting it away and fleeing to the great Captain of his salvation to be clothed in the white robe of His spotless righteousness.

“‘I *only* do my duty,’ he said, returning her proud, fond look with a deprecatory glance, and at the same moment hushing up the soft whisper in his heart, that there was no real self-

denial required in pursuing his employment, congenial as it was to his energetic, methodical temperament, that to use and improve the talent for conducting business he was conscious of possessing became a positive gratification.

“‘Besides,’ he continued gravely, ‘if I did not work hard, what would become of us all? It is my bounden duty, and I strive to perform it; but indeed, Alice, you must not give way to this idleness; think of the privileges you lose by not attending regularly; you ought to rise earlier in the morning; *I* am able to be in time, why should not you?’

“Alice did not retort that she was always up earliest of all on Sundays as on other days, that the regular attendance of her little brothers and sisters depended on her exertions in their behalf, as also the nicely-prepared breakfast, and the care of her mother. She only drooped her head with a painful sense of inferiority to this paragon brother, and murmured meekly, ‘I’ll try again, Oliver.’

“At this moment in burst three noisy boys, dragging along a pretty little girl with a torn, muddy frock.

“They greeted their mother boisterously, and then, all talking together, began to relate how Ellie had fallen in the mud, and they had picked her up; how brave she had been not to cry; and lastly, how hungry they all were for tea.

“Patient Alice went up to change the child’s dress, and returned to make more toast for the hungry boys; so that she herself was only able to snatch a hasty meal of crusts and broken pieces, before her mother grew fidgety that the teathings might be taken away, lest Oliver, who had returned to his work in the shop, should find the room untidy when he came back.

“When they were removed, the boys and Ellie sat down in one corner to their lessons. Alice began to mend the torn frock, and Oliver came in to read to his mother; for the people in that quiet little town generally did their shopping early in the day, and it was sufficient in the evening to attach the bell to the closed shopdoor.

“Oliver was then free to delight himself and his mother by the perusal of one of the standard works of the day. To-night there was an interruption; Ellie began to cry, and said she had a headache; Oliver looked up a little impatiently.

“‘She ought to go to bed,’ said Mrs. Leighton.

“‘Alice will take her,’ said Oliver; adding half to himself, ‘she won’t mind, as of course she can’t understand what I am reading.’

“Alice, as it happened, was very much interested. The book was simply written, and very attractive; but she rose immediately as a matter of course, and began to put away her little sister’s slate and books. Ellie, however, was no sooner released from her studies than she showed no disposition to go to bed, but climbed upon her mother’s sofa, and protested she was too cold to sleep.

“‘Hallo!’ cried one of the boys, ‘this sum is all wrong. I say, Oliver, just show me the fault.’

“‘Don’t be tiresome, Roger; you must work out your own sum.’

“‘But I have done it over and over again, and can’t find a single mistake.’

“‘Has not Alice gone through that arithmetic? She might help you.’

“‘Alice!’ cried Roger, in a tone of derision, ‘she doesn’t know what two and two make, and if you taught it her to-day, she’d forget it to-morrow; if you won’t help me, Oliver, say so plainly, and I’ll leave it undone.’

“‘May I try to help you, Roger,’ asked Alice’s gentle voice. ‘Oliver will be vexed if you leave it undone, and he is busy now.’

“Roger grunted an ungracious permission, and Alice took a chair beside him. But it was useless to pucker up her forehead, and weary her confused brain. The interesting information contained in every sentence of Oliver’s book mixed itself up with the figures. In vain she added the long columns, the result was different every time.

“‘It is of no use,’ she exclaimed despairingly.

“‘No use!’ echoed Roger. ‘You might have known you’d only muddle it more. Here, Oliver, *do* come and look at it.’

“‘Has not Alice helped you?’

“‘No, of course not.’

“‘It is just as well she had left school,’ sighed Oliver in a tone of compassionate superiority; and glancing at the sum, he instantly pointed out the error, and continued reading.

“Alice’s cheek flushed crimson as she took Ellie’s hand, and led her upstairs.

“Ellie was the pet of the house, and consequently an imperious little tyrant in her own playful, coaxing way. She had a great objection to be left alone in the dark, and always insisted on her sister remaining upstairs till she slept. So when Alice had placed her in bed, put out the light, and sung her evening hymn, she sat silent by the bedside, looking at the stars, and feeling very sad and weary. She thought of how little use or pleasure she was to any one. This lack of talent was so painful, it made Oliver, who was so clever himself, impatient and vexed with her; it prevented her mother relying on her, or even loving her, as she did him. All the younger children also perceived her inferiority, and despised her stupidity. And far up there in the deep, deep blue sky the stars shone double as she watched them through her tears.

“‘Alice, are you there?’ cried Ellen, starting. ‘It is dark. Where are you?’

“‘Here, Ellie; close beside you.’

“‘I don’t like the dark. Tell me what you said last night; you know, about the darkness and light being both alike to God.’

“Alice repeated the verse.

“‘Tell me God loves me,’ said the child, tossing her fair curls over the pillow as she turned.

“‘God loves Ellie very dearly. He always loved the little children; and He wants her to give Him her heart, to be made pure and good, that He may dwell there.’

“ ‘Yes?’ questioned the child sleepily.

“ ‘If Ellie chooses to be the Good Shepherd’s little lamb, and love Him, and try to please Him, He will always stay with her, and love her, and smile on her, like all the shining stars up there.’

“ ‘Does He love you, Allie?’

“ ‘Yes, I think—I *know* He does;’ and with the deep assurance of the truth of her words, the weight of sadness was lifted from her heart; and as Ellen’s blue eyes closed in irresistible slumber, Alice raised her head and looked up gladly. ‘To some He gives much, to me He gave few, *very* few. It is His own wise will; I must use it faithfully; occupy till He comes. Till He comes! Oh, I will trust the Lord Jehovah; for in Him is everlasting strength!’

* * * * * *

“ ‘Where’s Alice? Why is not dinner ready?’

“ ‘Where’s Alice? I want my satchel mended!’

“ ‘Where’s Alice? I have lost my Euclid!’

“ ‘Alice is not well; hush, my dears;’ and Mrs. Leighton rose slowly from her couch, and made a feeble effort to perform some of the many little offices that had so long devolved upon her daughter. The boys endeavoured to help her, with more good will than ability; so that Oliver coming in found the room in disorder, its usual air of neatness and comfort gone.

“ He asked for his sister, and went upstairs to see her. She was lying in bed all alone in the little attic, her hands tightly pressed to her throbbing temples. He took one of them kindly in his as he sat down, and asked her how she felt. He felt rather startled by her appearance—the burning cheeks, the dark eyes, unnaturally large and bright! But it was her own sweet, patient smile that parted the trembling lips, when she thanked him for taking the trouble of coming up to see her.

“ ‘Are you alone here all day, Alice?’

“ ‘Almost always; but I don’t mind it. It would never do

for mamma to sit here, and the others are out. I don't mind," she repeated, adding shyly, as if reluctant, yet compelled, to tell the source of her happy contentment, 'I like to remember what our Saviour said, "I am not alone, because my Father is with Me." I love to think that He is *my* Father also!'

"Oliver was surprised, having never heard Alice allude to these things before. He often thought her dull mind was incapable of any religious impressions. In his overestimate of himself he had greatly underrated his little sister, and though she now spoke with her usual bashfulness and humility, there was a steadfast look of perfect trust and peace on the suffering face that told of a calm beneath which he himself, with all his learning and religion, had never experienced. This glimpse into the inner life of the sister he had always held in contempt startled him somewhat. He rose and kissed her brow, calling up a look of glad surprise on her face as he did so; and telling her he hoped she would soon be well enough to come down amongst them all again, left the room.

"But Alice was not well enough to leave her room for many days. She became worse instead of better. Fever set in, and night after night she was tossing about in unconscious delirium.

"It was then that her real worth, her unobtrusive usefulness, was felt by the rest of the family, and her loss deplored by all. Ellie wept herself piteously to sleep, when she found there was no Alice to sing to her. Every hour the mother missed the gentle little nurse, the obliging ready hand, the careful house-keeper, and willing messenger. Even the boys were silent and awe-struck, and declared again and again that home was not like home without her, and the little parlour unbearable. And Oliver! —

"The night-lamp shed its feeble light over the sick-room—over the disturbed rest of the fever-stricken child—over the pale cheek of Oliver, as he tried to read by the little flickering flame. 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the

humble.' These were the words he read over and over again in Alice's little well-worn Bible. The child's ravings—every intelligible word of which was prayer or praise, or half-uttered verses of comfort and encouragement—verified the holy statement, 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble,' and pricked the proud, self-righteous youth to the heart; for how had he dared, in the pride of his ignorant heart, to despise and overlook the humble little sister whose very meekness and patience were the fruits of God's grace!

"He had always believed himself to be a true Christian. A year ago he had answered 'I do' to the solemn question whether he would renew the early promise made in his name. Month after month since then he had affirmed that he offered himself, body, soul, and spirit, to be a reasonable sacrifice to his God, and yet where were the fruits of his faith? He had loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; he had let no opportunity slip of showing himself to be better than his neighbours. And what was the result? He had believed in *himself*, trusted in himself, his own talents, his steadiness of purpose, his upright conduct, his industry and perseverance, instead of relying on the righteousness that cometh of Christ only.

"Here, in the solemn hours of the night, how all he had valued and boasted of crumbled into the veriest dust and ashes, compared with the glorious possessions of the despised little one who might now be passing away from him!

"Pride and self-righteousness had, all unseen and unsuspected, in the deep recesses of his heart, loosed the bright bands of his celestial armour, and it was not till now he perceived now this little fragment of his old clothing had marred the purity of his spiritual attire. As the great truth dawned on him, he closed the book, and instantly obeying its message to his heart, rose, and casting away his garment, came to Jesus in exceeding sorrow and anguish of spirit. He cried mightily unto God from the depths of a broken and contrite heart.

"Now that he was brought face to face with his stern foe.

Pride, he laid hold of the sharp sword, and dealt it an overwhelming blow, and then stretched forth the hand of faith to grasp the breast-plate of the only righteousness that will bear the scrutiny of an all-seeing God, even the righteousness of His dear Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

"Morning was breaking in the eastern sky, when he perceived that Alice had awoke, and was regarding him, with the quiet light of consciousness beaming in her eyes. He bent over her, and asked whether she wanted anything.

"‘No,’ she feebly answered, then smiled, and whispered, ‘I can’t think much now, brother; my head feels so tired; but I am very happy. God is round about me. Will you pray for me? You know He says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”’

"‘Oh, Alice!’—he turned away to hide the tears that filled his eyes—‘you must not call me *righteous*. I am a miserable sinner. I have treated you —— You are far, far ——.’ He stopped, observing the look of wonder in the large dark eyes, and remembering she must not be agitated, he sank on his knees beside her, and poured out his whole soul in humble, earnest prayer. She listened with a look of tranquil happiness; slowly her eyes closed, and she slept peacefully. The hired nurse entered to relieve the night-watcher, and Oliver went away. But his prayer was heard, and answered; and during her slow recovery he spent every spare moment with her, thoughtfully devising numberless little pleasures, and watching over her with untiring care and kindness. Alice often wondered in her gladness why Oliver was so very, *very* good to her. She was unconscious how much he had learned from her lowly example of meekness and humility, or with what power her simple words of thanksgiving, the timid utterances of her happy, grateful feelings touched and humbled the heart of her eldest brother.

"Oliver was changed. People perceived and remarked it, but made no attempt to define in what the alteration consisted.

Perhaps it would have been difficult to have done so ; for outwardly it was only observable that the steadiness had lost its sternness, the promptness its sharpness, the grave business-like manner its measured superiority, and bright gleams from the invisible armour shone in every look, word, and action of this Christian warrior."





CHAPTER XVI.

DISAPPOINTED.

Pleasant Pastures.

MRS. STANTON'S story made a strong impression on Ada's mind, and from that day she strove to overcome her besetting fault, and to walk more charitably and humbly.

Augustus, who had been somewhat alienated by her proud, overbearing ways, now became good friends with her again ; and for many days nothing occurred to break the harmony that existed among the children, or mar the enjoyment of their holidays.

Mrs. Stanton's exertions to promote all that could give them pleasure or profit never wearied ; and as aunt Charlotte's health improved daily in the fresh sea air, she showed unusual interest in all their plans and arrangements.

"I say, mamma," was the excited greeting of Augustus, Tom, and Alfred, as Mrs. Stanton and the two little girls came into the sitting-room one morning—both the latter with long wet hair streaming over their shoulders, for they had just returned from the baths—"do you know there is a rock here, uncovered only at low tide, that has a deep kind of gulf or fissure, into which the sea rushes with great force, making a loud gurgling noise. I heard some of the visitors talking about it to-day. Shan't we go and see it? The tide will be out this afternoon."

"Is it a dangerous place?"

"Oh, I should think not ——"

"You know, dear children, I *trust* you not to go into dangerous places, or anywhere where there is the slightest risk. If I thought you were not very careful and steady, I should send nurse with you when I cannot go myself."

"Oh, you may quite trust us, mamma!"

"We shall enquire about this wonderful place, if you like, and if it is safe we could go and see it together; but I had thought of another plan for this sunny afternoon."

"What is it, mamma?" asked Ada. "I am sure I shall like your plan best, the rocks are so slippery and weedy below the tide-mark."

"Before I tell it to you I have a piece of news I heard this morning from home. The servants tell me that Rolf continues very steady and diligent at his work under the gardener, and Jessie goes regularly to the day-school, and has been placed at the bottom of the lowest class, but is so quick and clever she rises a step every week."

"That's all right," said Gus impatiently. "Now, what is the plan?"

"I thought of going to the top of the hill behind the town. Every one says the view is lovely. And we might hire one of those nice little donkey-carriages for Aunt Charlotte, and two or three saddle-donkeys also, if Katie or Alfie thought they should like a ride, or you might all take it in turns. We should take a basket of provisions with us. I am sure Gus and Tom would help nurse to carry it. We could get some fruit as we pass through the town, which I am sure we should find very cool and refreshing by the time we got to the top."

The proposal was hailed with the greatest enthusiasm by all the children, and nothing else was talked about during breakfast-time. Directly it was over, they arranged to meet in the sitting-room about twelve o'clock, and then ran off to a little rocky cove near, to watch the tide coming in. What a happy morning they spent! retiring before each giant wave, as it

rolled majestically inward, often covering them with spray to their great delight, till the whole cove was a mass of rolling billows, and the children had been compelled to take refuge on the broad esplanade above their reach.

The tide was full at twelve o'clock; so directly the little Stantons perceived that it made no more advances, they hurried back to their lodgings, with excited faces, untidy hair, and bright rosy cheeks.

Mrs. Stanton met them on the threshold. Her face was grave and sad.

"I am so sorry to disappoint you, dear children," she said; "but we must postpone our climb to the top of the hill."

"Why?" they cried in chorus, as they followed her into the sitting-room.

"Dear Aunt Charlotte is not well. I sent for the doctor, and he seems anxious about her."

"Then we need not hire the donkey-carriage, that is all," said Augustus.

"Surely it does not prevent us going!" cried Ada.

"Should you like to go off and enjoy yourselves, leaving her ill and suffering at home?"

"I should not mind if we had you."

"Oh, Gus, you cannot mean that; the thought would take away all your pleasure. As we have to give it up, let us all try to do so cheerfully; I have some orders to give to our landlady, try to be as quiet as you can while I am away."

She left the room, and instantly there were subdued exclamations of complaint and dissatisfaction.

"What a day for Aunt Charlotte to choose to be laid up!" cried Augustus. "I declare it is really too bad to spoil all our pleasure like this!"

"It is mamma who makes all this fuss about it," groaned Ada. "I am sure Aunt Charlotte used often enough to be ill at home before mamma came, and no one thought anything of it!"

"Perhaps she is very bad now," suggested Katie.

"I have half a mind to go and see," said Ada.

"Do," cried Augustus, "and tell her how mamma has given up all our pleasure for her sake, and then perhaps she will try to make mamma go with us!"

"I know she hates spoiling people's pleasure," observed Tom.

"I don't quite like to go alone," said Ada, hesitating.

"Well, let's all come!"

Tom and Alfie held back.

"Mamma won't like it," they said.

"She'll be glad enough to go herself," said Augustus. "Can't you see it is only for goodness she is staying; her eyes were sparkling so this morning when she told us her plan, she looked as delighted as any of us."

So the two little boys, having no further objections to make, allowed themselves to be led away, and all the children trooped upstairs.

Augustus knocked boldly at his grand-aunt's door, and hearing her faint answer, opened it, and they all crowded in.

Aunt Charlotte was lying on the sofa, looking so pale and weak, the children were quite startled to see the change in her appearance from only the day before.

Ada told her the whole story in her most pleading, pathetic voice, and, just as they supposed, kind, unselfish Aunt Charlotte was grieved at their giving up so much pleasure on her account, and promised to speak to Mrs. Stanton.

"Do try to bring her to reason," exclaimed Augustus dolefully; "it is not as if you were really ill, Aunt Charlotte, *then* we should not think of it for a moment."

"My dear," said the old lady feebly, "say no more, I shall do my best for you."

Whereupon the children, unheeding her weary looks, began to discuss with each other the possibility of Mrs. Stanton according to their grand-aunt's request, all loudly expressing their opinion on the subject.

"That will do; go now, my dears," said poor Aunt Charlotte

several times ; but her low, tremulous tones were unheard in the tumult.

Suddenly the door opened, and Mrs. Stanton came in with a glance of surprise at the children that passed on quietly to the aged invalid. A change passed over her face ; she hurried towards Aunt Charlotte, and bent anxiously over her.

"Ring the bell, Ada!" she exclaimed, in a voice that awed them all into silence, "and run down stairs all of you."

The frightened children softly left the room, encountering nurse on the stairs. Self-reproach made them very silent and grave as they quietly seated themselves in the sitting-room.

After nearly half an hour of suspense, Mrs. Stanton joined them.

They listened to her few low words of reproof for their selfishness and thoughtlessness in silence. At length Katie ventured to ask in a whisper,

"How is Aunt Charlotte, mamma?"

"She is asleep now," answered Mrs. Stanton gravely.

"Mamma, I am sorry," said the little maiden wistfully ; "and so is Alfie and Tom."

"And Ada and Gus are sorry too," added Alfie.

"I say," said Gus, rather sheepishly, "we should not have made such a row if we had known she was so ill."

"Aunt Charlotte was never very strong," said Ada, adding in an audible whisper to Katie, "Mamma is not accustomed to see her ill. That is why she makes so much of it."

"She looks far worse than I ever saw her," said Augustus gravely.

"Yes," said Mrs Stanton ; "and notwithstanding her weakness and suffering, she has been begging me to let you go to the hill. I satisfied her at last by promising to let you all go, if you say you can *thoroughly* enjoy yourselves. Can you, Gus?"

"No," replied Augustus promptly.

"It would not be nice without you, mamma," cried the younger ones.

"Of course, we don't want to go now," said Ada discontentedly; "all the pleasure of it has been taken away."

"By whom?"

Ada fidgeted, but did not answer.

"Mamma," said Gus earnestly, "it is hard to think that God sends us these very little disappointments."

"It did not seem a very little one to you all just now."

"No, indeed, said Tom regretfully. "Why does He send them to us, mamma?"

"For our good, Tom."

"It does not seem to be for our good. We were all so happy and bright, and it has made us naughty and cross."

"Perhaps God saw, dear children, that when He gave you all these pleasant days by His grand and beautiful sea, that you were beginning to find all your happiness, and goodness, and cheerfulness in them instead of in Him; and to try whether you loved His holy will and pleasure first and best of all, He withdrew one little treat, and sent a little trial instead."

"And we all mourned over our lost treat, and rebelled against our trial," said Augustus thoughtfully.

"Dear boy, God, our loving Father, wills us to be happy; not only amused and entertained for a day or an hour, but full to overflowing of the deepest, holiest kind of happiness; and often when He leads His little flock over the thorniest road, they know more of this real abiding blessedness than when He allows them to wander over the pleasant pastures. Let me tell you a little story now. Nurse is with Aunt Charlotte, and has promised to call me when she awakes. As my next letter is P, I shall call my tale

Pleasant Pastures.

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places."—PSALM xvi. 6.

"Patience Perkins was walking down the principal street of Hammersley one fine afternoon in the beginning of summer, when the alternate white frosts and heavy showers, brief sun-

beams and sharp winds of spring were past and gone, and had given place to bright, settled weather, day after day bringing only warmth, sunshine, and soft breezes, genial and healthful as was little Patience herself. It was the most cheerful, beaming little face you ever saw, that glowed and smiled all to itself beneath the shade of the print sun-bonnet; and there was a depth of tranquil happiness shining in those mild grey eyes that looked so kindly on lame Joey Caudle, who was playing on his cottage doorstep, and gleamed so cheerily as the little maiden nodded to Jane Stubbs, who passed on the other side of the way.

“Not a child in all that little provincial town, or its outskirts, could be compared to Patience Perkins for unvarying good humour and unwavering cheerfulness!

“The tide of her pleasant, joyous temperament flowed in so deep and safe a channel, that all the winds and waves of this troublous world seemed to blow harmlessly over it, without leaving even a ripple on its smooth surface.

“People may say, and often do say, that it is easy enough to be happy when you have nothing whatever to vex or annoy you; but this is a mistake; for when people are inclined to be ill-humoured or fastidious, the most charming spot on earth would fail to give them enjoyment; and no position, however exalted, would satisfy them, or give them real pleasure.

“There is only one thing that lights our path through life with unbroken, unfailing brilliancy, and that is the love of Christ, that passeth knowledge. If that illumines the heart through its length and depth, and breadth and height, there is not a spot on earth too dark to bear the reflection of its radiance.

“A very dark spot on earth was that in which Patience Perkins’s lot was cast. Perhaps a more trying position for a child could not be found than to be an alien, an unwelcome guest, in her own father’s house—hated, buffeted, often ill-used by her father’s second wife, and the uncomplaining drudge of her large family of little ones. It was a sad, sad, dreary home;

even her father seemed careless and callous about his little first-born, and rarely noticed her.

"She reached the cottage door. The sounds of quarrelling and scolding made her pause for an instant on the threshold till the noise subsided into angry mutterings, then she turned the handle slowly, and entered.

" 'Well, it's high time for you to be back,' said her step-mother ungraciously. 'I wish to goodness other folks knew the torment you are to me.'

"Patience picked up little Daniel, who was crawling about the floor, whining piteously; and sitting down on the settle by the window, pillowed his head on her shoulder, and soothed him gently.

" 'The town-folks thinks you all sugar and honey, too good for this wicked world,' pursued Mrs. Perkins, to whom this was always a favourite subject of complaint against her inoffensive, helpful little step-daughter. 'I do just wish they had a month of you at home; 'twould soon change their song.'

" 'Well, why don't you give 'em a chance of it, mother, now that you have the opportunity?' asked Michael, the eldest boy.

" 'Hold your tongue!' retorted his mother, giving him a sharp box on the ear; 'you don't know what you're talking about.'

" 'I didn't know 'twas a secret,' returned her son sullenly; 'and it's no good trying to make it one either. Patience will be sure to hear of it somehow or other, and then she won't thank you.'

"His mother set her teeth firmly together, took him by the shoulders, and turned him out of the room. 'Patience will hear things when I choose, and no sooner,' she muttered. 'There's a whole week's stockings to be darned, and a basket-full of clothes to be sprinkled, before you ever set your head on the pillow this night, so you'd better look sharp!'

"Patience put down the child, and went up to take off her hat; but before she returned she re-armed herself for the coming

hard duties, and it was with the brightness of her heavenly armour shining in her sweet, patient face she returned to the thankless task awaiting her.

“Three of her little step-brothers and sisters came rushing in from school, and each and all seemed to consider her as only tolerated in their home to do the most severe and disagreeable work, and comply with all their whims and wishes. They had easily caught the sharp, commanding tone from their mother, and imperiously ordered her hither and thither; scolding or laughing at her as best suited their inclinations at the moment.

“Her slender frame was ill-fitted for the burden laid upon it, and it was with weary, aching bones the child lay down each night to rest, and awoke to enter upon another day of thankless toil and patient drudgery.

“Thankless toil! Little Patience never looked for or expected a word of gratitude or kindness from those for whom she worked so faithfully. She served another Master, the triune God of heaven and earth—her Father, her Redeemer, her Sanctifier; and to glorify Him in her daily life, to please Him perfectly, was her one aim and effort; her main endeavour ‘to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.’

“Little Patience Perkins was not quite alone in the world; she had one true friend who shared her joys, and pitied her for her sorrows far more than she did herself. This was Owen Macduff, the only son of an old Scotch shepherd, who had left the brown moorland and blooming heather of his northern home to follow his young laird, to whom he was faithfully attached, and had taken up his abode in a little rose-covered cottage on the fine estate his young master possessed, scarcely a mile from the little town.

Owen and Patience had known each other from earliest childhood. Their mothers had been cousins, but both died early, and their motherless condition knit their warm friendship more closely together.

“Owen had not a plan, a hope, scarcely a thought, that was not known to and shared by her; and, with the exception of some sad home scenes, Patience poured all her confidences into his ever sympathising ear.

“But the secret alluded to by Michael, and concealed from her by her step-mother, was never alluded to by Patience in her conversations with her boyish friend and adviser when business brought him to the town; for why should Owen be perplexed and worried as she had been by useless conjectures and fruitless guesses as to what it might be, who wanted her, or had been speaking about her? She felt sure it was something that concerned herself in an important way, otherwise why should Mrs. Perkins have struck Michael, her favourite of all her children?

“She brought this weary care with all her other burdens to the feet of Him who knew the secret, and could best guide and help her; and trusting herself simply and implicitly to His watchful love, dismissed the thought, and went on her heavenward way bright and peaceful as ever.

“‘After all, I don’t know why I don’t tell her. My Jane is getting handy, and I doubt much that the work Patience gets through pays for her board and lodging!’”

“These were the first words that fell on the attentive ear of little Patience, as she came into the kitchen one hot, sunny day. Her sudden appearance at that moment decided her stepmother to solve the mystery at once.

“‘Look now, Patience; we’ve enough mouths to feed here; and it seems to me a great lazy lass as you be don’t ought to be loitering round all day doing nothing; so Miss Hall, of Ivy Lodge, has been up here some days ago and spoke to me about you. It seems that old Macduff (who by the way is always meddling) has been and spoke of you to the squire’s lady. I suppose you was making a poor mouth to that good-for-nought son of his! and Miss Hall came to ask ——’

“‘Miss Hall!’ exclaimed Patience, clasping her hands, and

colouring with delight ; ‘ that sweet-looking young lady that sits by the pulpit in church ! Oh, is it—can it be possible !’

“ ‘ You needn’t go putting on raptures,’ said her stepmother coldly ; ‘ may be you’ll change to another key when your missis finds out what a precious treasure she’s got in you.’

“ Patience was silenced for the present ; but such glad tidings were too enchanting to be kept to herself ; and by-and-by, when she could get away from the round of tasks her stepmother seemed to take cruel pleasure in setting her, she stole up to the little garret she shared with two of her little sisters, and when she had shut the door, prayed to her Father in secret ; then opening her Bible at the 145th Psalm, she stood and sang it mentally in the depths of her joyful heart, and returned speedily to her work with the blissful sense of having her greatest joys as well as her deepest sorrows shared and reciprocated by her God.

“ That day month Patience awoke to find herself in a pretty little chamber bright with the flood of morning sunshine, that penetrated the closed blinds, and shed its radiance on every thing around. She awoke to realize that she was duly installed in her new place, having arrived late on the preceding evening, and found her new duties were to wait personally on the young lady she had so much admired in church, to read to her, attend to her bell, and do needlework, under the superintendence of the old housekeeper.

“ Her first day began, as every day for many years had been prefaced, by prayer and reading the word of God. And with such a preparation, it was no wonder she gave satisfaction to her kind, gentle employer, and surprised the gruff old housekeeper by her diligence and handiness.

“ Her lot was now fallen in pleasant places. Her great Commander had led His little warrior through a thorny ravine beset with foes, where she had to fight every inch of the way, to the broad green pasturage, where her many enemies seemed lost in the distance.

“But, oh, the vigilance of these inveterate foes! How implacable their hatred to the Christian soldier! how innumerable their devices to impede his progress!

“While all looked bright around her, the light burned dimly within. The pieces of her celestial armour were no longer kept burnished and gleaming in preparation for hard daily, hourly conflict. They were now seldom used, and began to hang loosely; their glowing reflection no longer beamed in those quiet eyes. They became grave, and even mournful, in their expression.

“‘Owen,’ she said one day, as by Miss Hall’s kind invitation he had come to tea in the kitchen, and was now walking with her round the large vegetable garden, ‘I think my place is too happy.’

“‘That’s a gude fault,’ said Owen, smiling.

“‘I don’t know that,’ returned Patience with a sigh.

“He looked at her enquiringly, but she turned away her head. The sweet grey eyes that had always sparkled and glowed with joyousness were brimming over with great unshed tears.

“‘I don’t know how it is, Owen,’ she continued, still with averted face, ‘but sometimes it seems to me that the pleasant pastures are more difficult to pass through safely than the rougher, thornier ways.’

“‘Ay,’ said Owen gravely, ‘I ken weel what you mean, I have often felt it mysel. Patience dear, when I saw how different your hame was frae mine, I used to think that perhaps it was a’ the rubs it got ilka day that made your trust and love shine sae bright.’

“‘I get no rubs or rough words now, Owen. It is a pleasure, a blessing, to serve such a lady as Miss Hall, one of the Lord’s chosen ones, who only lives to do good; and even Mrs. Watkins, the housekeeper, that I was at first a little afraid of, she just heaps kindness upon kindness; and Ruth is so merry and pleasant-spoken, and a soldier of the cross too, it just seems to me in such a household one should make great advances on the

road to heaven ; but I get satisfied with the outward every-day happiness of living in so nice and good a place, and I seem to have no battles to fight, but just to stand still and make no progress whatever.'

"Owen walked on in grave, thoughtful silence.

"'And how about the little quiet time in the early morn?' he asked at length ; 'the hour we said we should both keep for Him to buckle on the armour ; hae ye forgotten it, lass?'

"Patience dashed away her tears, and looked up at him earnestly.

"'I had nigh forgotten it, Owen. I have not kept it for a long time.'

"'In service like yours, Patience, your time is no your ain in the same way as it is wi' ——'

"'Oh, no, no, it isn't that ! I have plenty and plenty of time to myself ; but, Owen, I felt I was in such a good place, there was no need to give so much time all alone to God.'

"'There is nae safety anywheres wi'out it,' said Owen sadly. 'I've neglected it often mysel' ; but I never yet did so that the enemy didn't get some advantage over me. Ilka morn, the very first thing we maun do is to take up our arms, and strengthen ilka clasp of them by prayer and study of God's message. It seems to me our Captain sends us some new message ilka day, Patience lass ; and if we will nae open it, and read it, how can we obey it?'

"'Yes indeed,' sighed Patience ; 'you've found out the secret, Owen. I don't know what I should do without such a friend as you are.'

"'I hope I'll be your friend always till ——'

He stopped, and looked at her wistfully.

"'Till we die,' added Patience, simply and gravely.

"'I did nae mean that,' said Owen, blushing.

"'We shall always be friends,' said Patience, smiling, 'even after we die, in heaven.'

Owen was silent.

“ ‘Tis very true, what you said just now,’ she continued, ‘I have been a careless soldier. I have not been watching, and my armour unfastened in many places. How precious one little quiet minute was to me at home, where I was beset with dangers! I have, like Christian in the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, climbed up the steep hill of difficulty, and, falling asleep in the arbour, lost my most precious roll.”

“ ‘Ay,’ said Owen, smiling, ‘that word minds me of the picture of the Roll-call I saw once up in London; the soldiers coming after the battle to present theirsels before the commander. ’Tis like that we suld come, Patience, ilka morn and eve, before our great Captain, and feel His eyes are on us all through the warfare, loving, helping, and encouraging us. Now I maun say “gude-bye,” dear lassie.’

“There was a lingering farewell, and he went away; but Patience did not join the other servants till she had put Owen’s good advice into instant practice, and the next minute found her in her own little room on bended knee, seeking the Saviour she had in her fancied security wandered from of late.

“Day by day afterwards she found that by living in very close communion with her great Captain, the subtle, hidden foes that had impeded her steps heavenward came more fully into view; and by His grace she won many a victory in the contests that took place on those Pleasant Pastures.”





CHAPTER XVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

Quit you like Men.

THE children made many good resolutions when Mrs. Stanton went back to Aunt Charlotte's room; but they found the long evening very dull. It was so difficult to keep quiet in that stupid little room without mamma's presence to make everything bright and pleasant. They were now sufficiently impressed with the necessity of sitting very still, and talking in whispers till bedtime, which, however, was for once welcome to them all.

But the next morning all was forgotten, and they came clattering down stairs with the usual noise till recalled by Mrs. Stanton's appearance as she stood outside Aunt Charlotte's room with her finger raised to her lips. She did not come down to breakfast, but sent word they might go out as usual to sit on the rocks, as Aunt Charlotte was no better, and must have perfect quiet.

They were all glad to get away from the oppressive stillness of the house to the fresh sea breeze and musical dash and roar of the waves.

At dinner they saw their stepmother for a few moments; she looked sad and weary, and had no sooner sat down at the table than she was summoned again to the invalid's room, and the children were left alone to make their own plans for the afternoon. They were by this time becoming accustomed to the

idea of Aunt Charlotte's illness, and their first awe had worn off; so one plan after another was discussed, till Augustus proposed that they should wait till the tide was going out, and then climb down to the fissure in the rocks where the waves puffed and surged.

"Shall we ask mamma if we may go there?" said Tom, hesitating, as they went down the little garden path.

"I declare he is afraid!" laughed Augustus.

"Hush!" said Katie softly, with a wistful glance at the *one* window with the blind drawn down.

"Mamma asked if the place was dangerous when you told her about it," said Tom, lowering his voice.

"Well, her asking the question did not make it so, did it?"

"No; but we might ask some one else."

"Can't we use our own eyes?"

"She said she trusted us not to go into danger."

"I should just like to know your motive for all these objections," said Augustus angrily. "Is it goodness or cowardice?"

"I suspect it is the latter," said Ada.

"I don't know what Tom will grow up to be," said his brother scornfully; "there does not seem to be a prospect of his ever becoming a man."

"Does 'becoming a man' mean to run into danger?" asked Tom.

"It means to be afraid of nothing," said Gus.

"But what is wrong," added Ada.

"Well, it's not wrong to go and see a wonderful sight," said Augustus; "there is the place; come at once. We don't know the moment the tide may turn."

A frothy wave washed over the lower part of the huge sloping rock as he spoke, and Tom, becoming very pale, stopped short. Augustus, between jeers and threats, urged him forward. With some difficulty they all descended the cliff, and hand-in-hand stepped out upon the rock, along one side of which the waves

howled up the narrow crevice, and puffed out at the other end in a sheet of snowy spray. Alfie trembled at the awful noise, and tears of silent fear rolled down little Katie's cheeks. Tom stood at the highest point, white and motionless, while Augustus and Ada laughed and clapped their hands in delight at the pillar of angry surf that shot upward from every wave.

Suddenly they perceived that the people walking on the esplanade above them ran to the edge of the cliff, and waving hats and handkerchiefs, beckoned the children towards them.

Ada and Gus looked at each other in amazement, and then glanced seaward. A huge green billow, gathering strength as it rolled along, was advancing towards them with resistless force and speed.

The children shrieked in terror, and clasping their arms round each other huddled together on the highest point for safety, while the seething mass of water washed completely over the rock, the dread cold surge spreading up to their ankles.

"The tide has turned ; we are lost," said Augustus, his white lips scarcely able to form the words.

"There is mamma!" screamed Alfred, sobbing violently. "Oh, call her! call her!"

"Hush!" said Ada breathlessly ; "she is speaking to us."

They listened intently, and could hear her clear tones above the roar of the water.

"Wait for the third wave—then run ; I will meet you."

The words were scarcely uttered when a deluge of salt spray covered them. It cleared away, and once more the crowd on the esplanade saw the little group, clinging fast to each other. There was nothing to be done but wait where they were for the third, then rush to the lower part of the rock, and try to get beyond the reach of the lesser waves that would then follow.

"Pray to God in your heart, Katie," whispered little Alfred, looking fearfully at the boiling whirlpool that rushed and rolled between them and their stepmother.

"I have prayed to Him," said Katie, raising her steadfast



"The children shrieked in terror, and clasping their arms round each other, huddled together on the highest point for safety."

"A NARROW ESCAPE."

CHAP. xvii.

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eyes to the fleecy clouds that floated calmly overhead ; “and I think perhaps He will soon say, ‘Peace, be still,’ and let us go to mamma.”

“Look !” whispered Ada tremulously ; “I am sure she is praying for us too.”

They all looked towards Mrs. Stanton, as she stood upon the extreme edge of the cliff, her slight figure bent forward, her hands clasped tightly together, her lips moving softly, and her white face turned towards the sea.

The third great wave broke over the rock, saturating them all completely ; and instantly obeying their stepmother’s gesture, they rushed into the water between the dangerous fissure and the cliff. Struggling, swaying, pressing onward, they reached the edge, and Mrs. Stanton bending over caught Alfie and drew him upward. Katie was then rescued ; Gus climbed up by himself, and dragged Ada after him ; but Tom, poor faint-hearted Tom ! seeing another billow rising, let go his grasp on the rock with a piercing shriek, and had not his stepmother quickly grasped his arm, he would have been swept away in the wave that now washed over him. Mrs. Stanton held him fast till it had passed away, then with the help of Augustus’ strong arm, drew him up, and, gasping, terrified, and breathless, the little party stood safely on the cliff. Augustus’ first words were something in extenuation of their having run into such danger, but Mrs. Stanton scarcely seemed to hear him. Murmuring half-aloud a few words of heartfelt gratitude to God, she led them home, amid the commiserating words and looks of the crowd of visitors that had collected from every quarter.

On the threshold they were met by nurse, with the request from the invalid that Mrs. Stanton would go to her at once. She obeyed the summons immediately ; and while nurse was taking off their wet things, scolding vigorously all the while, she sent word that they had better go to bed. Whether this was as a salutary punishment or a wise precaution, they were at a loss to determine.

However, next day she spoke to them very seriously about the accident of the night before, about the thoughtlessness and disobedience that led them into such imminent peril, and the hair-breadth escape they had had from a sudden and early death; then, they all kneeling down with her, she thanked God for their deliverance, and prayed that the lives so spared might be more than ever consecrated to His service, while each young heart joined earnestly both in the petition and thanksgiving.

"Mamma," said Tom with quivering lip, as they rose from their knees, "I could not sleep for such a long time last night; every time I closed my eyes I saw the waves coming over me."

"Tom was in more danger than any of us," said Ada. "If you had not held him fast that time, mamma, he would have been swept away in a moment."

"Yes," said Augustus, shuddering; "and if he had, it would have been my fault. I thought so at the time when I helped to draw him up."

"Why your fault?" asked his stepmother.

"Because," said Gus, colouring, "he was the only one of us who did not want to see that puffing hole, when you said you trusted us not to go into danger."

Mrs. Stanton laid her hand caressingly on Tom's shoulder. There was a moment's pause, a moment of hard fighting in Tom's heart, then he raised his eyes to her face a conqueror.

"Mamma," he said honestly, "I only said it because I was afraid."

"And we laughed at him," said Ada.

"It was I who laughed," said Augustus; "I said he would never be a man."

"If Tom had tried to dissuade you all from going because he knew I relied on your not running wilfully into danger, he would have been far more manly, and shown more real courage, than if he had faced those waves again, and gone back among them to the end of the rock."

"I could never have done that," said Tom, shivering at the mere thought.

"Mamma," asked Ada, "how is Aunt Charlotte?"

"I am afraid, dear, there is still no change for the better."

"Had she a better night?"

"No; she was awake for hours. She fell into a quiet sleep this morning, which I hope will rest and strengthen her."

"Mamma," pleaded Alfie, "as nurse is with her now, and she does not want you till she wakes, would you not have time to tell us another little story?"

"Very willingly, Alfie, if you all wish it; I shall tell you one called

Quit You Like Men.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

"The bleak shores of a Scottish loch lay bare and desolate under the November sky; giant mountains watched around it still and drear, and the troubled waters rose and fell with a dull murmuring sound, as they washed with angry foam the base of a flat lichen-covered rock, on which a fisher-boy lay at full length.

"A mass of unkempt flaxen hair, a ruddy sun-burnt face, and a pair of very bright intelligent eyes, a ragged tartan kilt, surmounted by a short black jacket out at the elbows, and two hard bare feet, completes the description of Duncan MacGregor.

"He was intently poring over an old book lying open on the rock, and weighted with pebbles at the corners to resist the sharp strong wind that from time to time blew down from the mountains.

"Every now and then he raised his head and shut his eyes while endeavouring to repeat what he had learned in a half-audible tone.

"'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.'

"He was still saying the same words over and over to himself,

when a shout from the stony margin of the lake made him start and look down.

"A crowd of poorly-clothed boys were hailing him with vehement gestures.

"Hi, Duncan, come doon, lad; here's the young laird wanting a row, and you maun come tak' an oar; he's so tied to his leddy-mither's apronstring ye ken, he canna stir on the water wi'out us."

"This description of the state of the young laird's position was received with a shout of laughter, causing a deep flush of shame and anger to darken the cheek of a little boy standing on the outskirts of the noisy crowd. He was a handsome lad, not more than ten years of age, dressed in full Highland costume, with long fair curls, and the air of one accustomed to have his own way.

"I could do so if I chose," he answered hotly. "You know I could. Am I not having my own way now, in going out with you all instead of that stupid old man?"

"Duncan bent over the crag, and enquired:

"Hae the Luddy Douglass gi'en ye leave to gang oot wi' us, Maister Archie?"

"I didn't ask her," he replied, with a toss of his head. "I'm not just the baby you think me to be."

"Come, Duncan," shouted the others.

"Bide a wee," said Duncan slowly. "Did na' the leddy forbid the young laird to gang on the loch wi'out auld Davie?"

"What o' that!" was the impatient cry. "Her leddyship's no' at hame the day. She's gane awa' to the toon. Come."

"I canna gang wi' you," replied Duncan calmly, as he threw himself into his former position on the rock.

"He's afraid," sneered Archie. "I would not be such a coward for the world. Let's go away, and leave him."

"But the others knew he was a good oarsman, and resolved to goad him into compliance.

"Ho! the minister in his pulpit," cried one, in a mocking tone.

"It nearly gars him greet to see such a lot o' sinners."

“ ‘He wants to stand weel wi’ the new minister up at Craigiefort,’ cried another.

“ ‘He’s aye rinning aff to the kirk o’ Sabbaths, and learning verses to win a little siller may be.’

“ These taunts brought a flush of colour to Duncan’s face. He leaned over the rock again.

“ ‘Lads,’ he said, ‘I ken weel who it was that steeped my bonnet in mud to stop me frae the kirk ; that shied stanes after me as I went up the hill last Sabbath ; but I’ve begun to serve One whae teaches love and gude-will to a’. So I did na’ think o’ revenge ; but now this is downright wrong to deceive the gude leddy whae trusts her son. I canna go wi’ ye, lads, and I wish you’d think o’ a bonny walk or a climb instead. Come, I ken a braw place over the burn yonder that I wot the young laird has na’ seen. Let’s a’ gang there.’

“ This suggestion was received with a storm of hisses and laughter ; and many taunting threats were levelled against the ‘saint wi’out elbers.’

“ ‘Perhaps he’s no’ able,’ broke in a more friendly voice ; ‘ye ken he’s been poorly of late.’

“ ‘Are ye no’ strang enow to handle an oar?’

“ Duncan hesitated. Here was an excuse already invented for him ; should he avail himself of it ? But no, the inspiriting words of his scripture lesson were still present with him, ‘Stand fast, quit you like men.’ He rose to his feet, and folding his arms, looked down upon them once more, firm as the rock on which he stood.

“ ‘I hae been poorly, lads ; and am no’ so strang just now ; but that is no’ the reason I will na’ go. Laddy Douglas hae forbid Maister Archie to gang wi’out Davie ; the great God in heaven sees and hears all we do, and will no’ be pleased if yo mak’ him disobey.’

“ ‘If he likes to hae his own way its nought to us.’

“ ‘Ay though, it is. I should fear me to sin against God ; nae gude would ere come o’ it.’

“‘Coward ! coward ! coward !’ The hateful word resounded over the loch, and was re-echoed by the hills around.

“Archie shook his fist at him in a transport of passion. ‘Very well,’ he cried threateningly, ‘don’t come, for we don’t want you ; but thank me if ever my mother employs any of your folk again. You’ll live to rue this day, Duncan MacGregor !’

“They left him at last. Should he yet rue the day ? Would the threat be carried out, and the spoilt child succeed in inducing the lady to withdraw her patronage from his poor family ? What a prospect was then before them !

“He knelt on the huge crag, and clasped his hands together : ‘O God, I am weak and helpless, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I !’

“He heard the sound of singing and laughter, and the heavily-laden boat came into view. Young Archie Douglass sat at the helm.

“It was, as we have said, a louring day, with sudden strong gusts of wind. He could see that presently they shipped their oars, and baited their lines : one was put into the inexperienced hands of the young laird. They were very still for a while, till, with a scream of delight and excitement, Archie jumped up, jerking the line vehemently, at the end of which hung a gleaming, silvery fish. The boat rocked perilously from the sudden movement ; at the same moment a blast of wind swept the loch, the boat capsized ! Without a moment’s warning, they were all struggling in the water. With the exception of the young laird, they were all expert swimmers ; and when Duncan, who had plunged instantly into the water, came up to the scene of the accident, they had all struck out for the shore, leaving the terrified, helpless boy clinging desperately to a floating oar. In his eagerness Duncan forgot to use caution, and swam up close to him. Archie instantly clasped him round his neck, thus utterly incapacitating him from exertion. In another moment they must both perish. Vain were entreaties and persuasions. Archie’s blind terror was destroying them both. Fortunately

the oar still floated near, and Duncan caught hold of it. Archie being by this time greatly exhausted, ceased struggling, and Duncan, with all the strength he could muster, swam to the shore. The usual landing-place was too far off to attempt to reach it, so Duncan directed his fast-failing strokes to the base of his rocky seat as the nearest point. There the water was even more troubled, and as he raised Archie on the low ledge in safety, he was thrown two or three times against the rock before he could catch a firm hold of the stunted bushes growing in the clefts, and draw himself by their aid out of the water.

"The young laird, having suffered more from abject fear than anything else, soon revived in a place of comparative safety, and flinging his dripping hair from his face, held out his white, trembling hand to Duncan.

"*'Rin awa' hame,'* panted Duncan, clasping it feebly. *'I've hurt mysel' a wee agin the rock, and canna stir.'*

"*'Oh, Duncan, try, do try!'* cried Archie, shaking with cold, and gazing entreatingly into the wan face beside him. *'Give me your hand again, and I'll help you; you'll just die here. Do try?'*

"*'I canna,'* repeated Duncan faintly. *'I'm no' afeard o' death, sir; my Saviour will help me to stand fast in the faith. Ye'll tell poor mither that. Rin hame, sir, or there'll be twa deaths instead o' ane.'*

"*'I shan't leave you,'* cried Archie with energy; *'you might slip back into the water before I could get help.'*

"Duncan made a gesture of entreaty; and seeing the necessity of the case, he wasted no more time, but ran as fast as he could to the village, where his re-appearance was hailed with great enthusiasm. On returning to the spot, they found to their joy that Duncan was safe, and still conscious. He was soon carried to the laird's carriage, and driven to the castle, while his poor mother was summoned to his side.

"No evil consequences followed Archie's immersion, but

Duncan had been much bruised by being thrown against the cliff, and was therefore confined to his bed for some little time.

"It was a great pleasure to Archie when at length he was permitted to go down to the housekeeper's room to see him.

"'Well,' he said, tossing back the bright curls from his glowing face, 'I am very glad they have let me come to see you at last, Duncan. Are you better?'

"'I'm nigh weel to do agin, sir.'

"'That's right. You don't look it though, you are so white.'

"'I'll have red enough in the face when I get out on the braes again, and feel the caller air.'

"'Yes, I am sure you will. I shall ask the doctor myself to let you go out; I am sure a breeze from the loch——' He stopped short, the rosy tints in *his* cheeks were deep enough as he turned to the fire, and taking up the poker began to push in little obtruding lumps of coal with a grave pre-occupied air.

"'I say,' he began at length, 'do you remember what I called you that day you were lying on the rock, and wouldn't come on the water with me?'

"'Aye, weel,' nodded Duncan sadly.

"'Well,' said Master Archie with an effort, 'I don't think you a coward now.'

"A gratified smile played round Duncan's lips.

"'Do you know what I think of you?' demanded the young heir, making a desperate thrust with the poker at a large obstinate block.

"Duncan shook his head, and looked up enquiringly.

"'I think you are like the bravest man that ever won a battle.'

"Duncan coloured, and smiled. 'I maun be a very short one,' he said, laughing awkwardly.

"'I don't mean the outside of you,' said Archie loftily, 'that is not much bigger than myself; but *within*, you know, you have a heart, or a mind, or something of that kind, just exactly like a man.'

“‘I was learning some’at,’ said Duncan shyly, after a pause, ‘when they ca’d me that day; ye winna be offended if I tell it you, sir?’

“‘No,’ said Archie graciously, ‘I should be very glad to hear it.’

“‘It was a verse o’ the gude book,’ said Duncan blushing and looking down; ‘it said, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”’

“Archie listened attentively. ‘I have always wished to be a man,’ he said, ‘and if mamma was not so very absurd about me, I should do hundreds of manly things.’

“‘Nay, sir, your leddy mither is na fullish about ye. She lo’es ye weel; and the manliest thing ye could do wad be to attend to her wishes, and no’ gie her cause to fret and vex hersel’ about you.’

“‘It isn’t manly to be ordered about,’ said Archie, closing one eye, and aiming the poker right into the centre of a glowing range of red lumps.

“‘Then isn’t a soldier manly, sir? Surely ’tis their business to obey always.

“‘Of course; but I hate to be told not to do this and that, because it’s dangerous, or some such stuff. I think boys are made to be brave and adventurous.’

“‘What suld ye say to a soldier wha rushed into the battle wi’out orders, when his officer had seen a snare laid for him, and said he maun lie still? Wad ye ca’ *him* brave and manly?’

“‘I should not mind so much, if it were a *man* that ordered me.’

“Duncan gazed sadly at the little rebel, and shook his head.

“‘Hae ye never thought, sir,’ he said slowly, ‘how often ye find that ’tis the bravest as’ll gie in to the weakest, and be kind to ’em? A coward can i’ll afford to be gentle to one whae vexes him. Folks wad be quick to say that he feared him; but a brave mon can bear sauce frae a weaker; for ilka bodie would praise and lo’e him for it, and aye say, “Weel for that ither he

hae sic patience ; for if he chose he could thrash him lusty and weel.” He paused a moment. The little laird might not be pleased with such free speaking ; but girding on his armour, he continued steadily : ‘ As I sat here musing o’er the verse, I thought how ’twas just this that showed our Saviour’s goodness to men. He could aye hae ca’d a million angels to Him, and ga’ed up abuve their heads to heaven in a moment ; but, nay, He would na do sic a thing. He just bore all the mocking, and scourging, and cruel, cruel death, because he lo’ed us a’ so tender and so weel.’

“ ‘ I never thought of that,’ said Archie, laying aside the poker and folding his arms.

“ ‘ Had ye thought o’ Him, sir, ye would na hae found it hard to gie in to your leddy mither’s wishes ; ye suld hae minded that ’twas *His* orders, and that in not heeding her ye were refusing to heed Him.’

“ Archie raised his bright, ingenuous face. ‘ Good-bye, Duncan,’ he said frankly, holding out his little hand ; ‘ I shan’t forget what you have said just now. I think you quit yourself like a man ; like a brave, brave soldier ! You would not go with me when you knew it was wrong, and yet you were not afraid to jump into the cold, deep lake to save my life ; and now you do not fear to tell me to my face that I was wrong ;’ and with a quick, warm flush on his open, honest countenance the little laird went away.

“ Up jumped those restless young feet, two steps at a time, to the library, where his gentle, indulgent mother sat reading a book ; which was instantly laid down as the curly head peeped in.

“ ‘ Well, Archie darling,’ she said with a smile and a sigh, ‘ I hope you are not going to play any more dangerous freaks.’

“ ‘ No, mamma,’ said the little fellow, skipping from one bright bouquet to another in the rich carpet as he approached her ; ‘ but I have just been to see Duncan MacGregor.’

“ ‘ And how is he ? poor boy !’

“ ‘ Pretty well. He hopes to be out in a day or two. But,

mother, I want you to grant me one little request. Would you allow him to work about the place a little, where I could see him often, under the gamekeeper or gardener?’

“‘Most willingly, dearest, if you wish it.’

“‘I do, mamma, very much; for he has been talking to me ——’

“‘Asking you to speak to me?’

“‘Oh, no, no! he never even thought of such a thing. But—but——.’ He hesitated, and stroked the velvet trimming of her gown. ‘Mother,’ he whispered, ‘I have vexed you often and often, and made you nervous and anxious about me, but—I am now going to be a *man*!’

“‘A *man*, my darling! That is what alarms me most of all; for your idea of manliness is to go, against my express wishes, into all sorts of dangers.’

“‘No, mamma; that is the very thing Duncan and I have been talking about. The bravest men are those that attend most to the orders of their Captain; and, mamma, don’t you know what our Captain has said?’

“‘Who do you mean, dear?’

“Archie was very busy with the velvet and jet buttons for a long time, then he blushed to his fair temples, and shaking the golden curls about his face, answered softly, with downcast eyes, ‘In the Bible the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Captain of our salvation, is He not, mother dear? and His command is, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” Papa is gone away to live with Jesus for ever; but I have you, and I mean to try, like Duncan, to be a soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I shall never forget the verse he was learning the day he saved my life. It was this, mamma: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”’”





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAST FOE VANQUISHED.

Rest Comes at Length.

A WEEK passed away, during which they saw but little of their stepmother, whose whole attention was taken up with the aged invalid. Aunt Charlotte's health continued in the same precarious state, the children were therefore required to be very quiet indoors, and to find amusement for themselves when they were out.

They knew their grand-aunt was seriously ill, and when in the house were always very good and quiet, never forgetting the importance of moving and speaking softly, and sending her many kind inquiries and messages. But when out in the bright sunshine, sitting beside those magnificent waves, they seemed to throw off sorrow and care, and enjoy themselves thoroughly.

It was therefore a great shock to them all, when one evening on returning home Mrs. Stanton met them on the staircase, and said gravely,

"Aunt Charlotte wishes to see you all. Come in very quietly."

"Is she better?" asked Augustus, looking startled.

"No; I fear not. She is calm and happy, and—very near her rest."

There was a look of surprise and fear on all the young faces, and Alfie asked tremulously,

"Is she going to die, mamma?"

"I fear so, dear child." Mrs. Stanton's eyes filled with tears, and Katie and Alfie burst into a noisy fit of crying.

"Hush! hush!" she whispered gently; "you must not cry, dears. Aunt Charlotte is very glad to go; she knows there is a place prepared for her in heaven; she will be far happier there."

"Is she glad to leave us?" asked Katie tearfully.

"She loves her Saviour best, Katie; she longs to go to Him; but she wants to say good-bye to you all, and we must not keep her waiting. You will all be very quiet, will you not, dear children?"

It was a calm autumn evening, the sunset rays brightened the sick-room, and the splashing of the waves came softened to the ear through the opened window. Aunt Charlotte lay very still and motionless, all the weary lines of care and infirmity smoothed away from her placid face. Her eyes were closed, and her white hair parted smoothly on her brow; but as the awe-struck children grouped themselves beside her bed, she opened her eyes, and smiled upon them.

"Kiss me, my dears," she murmured. They obeyed, touching their warm, rosy lips to her pale cheek lightly, and in silence.

"Children," she said feebly, "it used to worry me to think how little control I had over you, and to think you might not grow up a comfort to your papa; but now"—she turned, and fixed on Mrs. Stanton a look of loving tenderness, so deep, so bright, that none of the children ever forgot it, as she went on—"now I leave you in good hands. Your dear mamma is one of the best of God's good gifts to you, and I hope you will learn more and more to appreciate it, and be dutiful and loving towards her."

She closed her eyes, and lay perfectly still. The golden sunbeams wandered into the room; across the sea there was a path of radiant light; each wave was touched with the sunset glow as it rolled solemnly in over the hoary rocks.

Aunt Charlotte awoke from her brief slumber, and spoke in the same restful, placid tone. "Good-bye, my dears; good-

bye." Then she turned to Mrs. Stanton, and smiled. "My life has been long and dreary," she said, "a weak and weary pilgrimage; but rest comes at length. A weary old woman, my dear, of little use on earth, and yet the Lord will receive me, for His dear Son's sake."

"'Whosoever believeth in Him hath everlasting life,'" repeated Mrs. Stanton sweetly and clearly. "'Fear not; for I have redeemed thee.'"

"Even *me*," murmured Aunt Charlotte. "Thank God, you have been a good niece to me, my dear; my old heart has blessed you many a time, and I have given thanks for my dear nephew's helpmeet. God bless you," she added solemnly; and raising with an effort her withered hand, she laid it on the fair head bowed near her on the pillow. "Now kiss me again, Minnie; for I am very weary. Good-bye, my dear; good-bye."

Her eyes closed again. They sat watching the light fading to the pensive twilight, and the moon rose, shining softly on the tranquil, aged face on the pillow, and gleaming on the drooping curls of Katie as she sat with her head on Mrs. Stanton's lap.

The doctor came in, but soon left again; and they seemed to have sat there for hours, when once more Aunt Charlotte's eyes unclosed.

"Rest comes at length," she said, in the tone of a tired child sinking to sleep. There was a little sigh, and the weary spirit had fled to its heavenly home.

The children kissed the dear familiar face, and, still silent and in tears, left the chamber of death.

A week later the frail body was laid to rest in the churchyard on the hill, within the sound of the music of the waves, there to wait till the trump of the archangel should summon it to rise.

The day after the funeral the children were wandering restlessly about the house, oppressed and sad, speaking in whispers

as they looked out drearily on the sea, and feeling unable to settle down to any employment, when to their great relief Mrs. Stanton came into the sitting-room. The sweet composure of her face seemed to soothe their restlessness, and give them comfort, as they all gathered round her in the window.

She spoke to them of death, and the great necessity of having a good hope through grace; picturing to their minds the last great day, when all the nations of the earth should rise again, and stand before the great white throne.

They were all impressed and attentive, and there followed a long, solemn silence, which at length Alfred broke by begging for a story; and Mrs. Stanton told them that the name of the next should be dear Aunt Charlotte's last words, and in low, soft tones began

Rest Comes at Length.

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."—HEBREWS iv. 9.

"‘Three a penny,’ moans a little faint voice through the busy thoroughfares of our great capital. ‘*Only* one penny for three.’

"The unheeding crowd pass on their way. Some even jostle roughly against the tray of match-boxes, and push the ragged seller hither and thither in their eager rush and hurry.

"But Joey is accustomed to hard usage. He draws nearer the edge of the muddy footway, and endeavours in vain to attract a passing glance from a few set of faces borne down by the ceaseless stream. Perchance even to touch a compassionate chord in some benevolent heart, the small treble chants its unavailing cry—‘Three a penny, matches; *only* one penny for three.’

"Oh the piteous emphasis on that word ‘*only*!’ How it increases to mournful, even passionate entreaty, as the dense fog thickens! The lamps are lit, and the fast-deepening twilight lessens the throng on the pavement.

"All are by this time too much intent on their own safety to bestow even a look on the pale, wan face of the little match-seller; while his chilblained fingers, blue and numbed with

cold, presents the old wooden tray somewhat more timidly and wistfully than before ; for all hope of selling a box that evening is fast fading away.

“ Ah, not one amongst the hastening multitude, whose chill, vacant eyes fell on that little shivering creature, imagined for one moment that they were in the vicinity, nay, in the very presence of a Christian soldier, a prince in disguise ! Not one perceived the radiant glow from the hidden armour that shone in those sweet, appealing eyes. Poor, destitute, helpless little being, they shrunk from him with scorn or condescending pity, or perhaps with a shrug of disgust. Little recked they of the grand warfare that was raging all that sharp snowy day in that brave young heart—the fierce strife against impatience, mistrust of God, and unmurmuring at His dealings ; and as towards evening the combat waged less fiercely, and sweet, strong assurance of his Commander’s love and care filled his soul, there was less passion, less despair in his oft-recurring cry, and gently and meekly the earnest words rung forth : ‘ Three a penny, matches ; only three a penny.’ ”

“ But though no compassion is shown to him, an opportunity soon presents itself where he can do a kindness for another. An old gentleman runs against the red letter-receiver at the corner, and drops his thick walking-stick. Joey darts forward, and picking it out of the mud, rubs the ivory handle in his ragged coat, and presents it to him in silence.

“ ‘ Humph ! ’ mumbled the old gentleman, sticking it under his arm, and rubbing his right elbow with a frown of pain. ‘ What makes ’em stick these receivers always in the way ? ’ ”

“ Poor Joey looked contrite, to atone for the non-appearance of apologetic regret on the part of the pillar ; and after several minutes’ fumbling in his great coat pocket, the old gentleman produced a very bright penny, which he presented to the ragged urchin with a decisive nod, as much as to say, ‘ Take it, and be thankful ; for no amount of entreaties will extort more.’ Then resuming his stout cane with a flourish in the air he strutted

away, and Joey, with joyful alacrity, darted off in the opposite direction; one hand clasping tightly the wooden tray, while fast shut up in the other lay the precious coin.

"All at once he stopped short before the bright red, blue, and yellow jars, displayed in the well-lit windows of a chemist's shop, and fell into deep cogitation. The result of which was a sudden pursing of his lips into a look of great determination; and with bold step and beating heart he advanced, pushed open the swinging glass doors, and laid his penny on the counter. A tall youth, with a pale yellow moustache, and sandy hair brushed very smooth, glanced rather superciliously over the counter.

"'Me—di—cine,' said Joey briefly and distinctly.

"'Who for?—yerself?'

"'No.'

"'Who, then?'

"'Someone else,' returned Joey somewhat mysteriously.

"'What 's up with 'in?'

"'It's an 'er.'

"'Well, 'er then. Is she bad?'

"'Very bad.'

"'Ser'us?'

"'What's that?'

"'Ser'us ill—dang'rous.'

"'Yes.'

"'With what?'

"'Dunno—everything.'

"'Mother?' questioned the lank youth curiously.

"'No.'

"'What's she to you, then?'

"'Nothink.'

"The young man looked surprised, shook his head several times, contemplated Joey with piercing scrutiny, and sunk into profound thought.

"Joey took up his penny, and hit it gently against the counter to rouse him.

"This expedient met with startling success.

"'Powder or pill?' exclaimed the meditative shopman, with a liveliness that was alarming after his long abstraction.

"'Powder,' said Joey, without giving himself time for reflection.

"'Sure?'

"'Yes, sure,' he returned, nodding vehemently; 'she has such a little swaller.'

"The small white parcel was handed over to him, and crushing it tightly in his cold hand, the little fellow ran off, his wan face beaming with excitement and happiness. Down by-ways, lanes, and alleys he ran, till he reached his destination, a small dilapidated-looking little den, in one corner of a wood-yard, close by the river. His quick pace slackened sensibly as he neared it, and it was with a paler cheek and frightened eyes, that he pushed the old door ajar and peeped in. Silence and solitude reigned within the wretched room, and it was with a look of relief Joey turned away, and climbing over the huge logs and planks that lay scattered around, crossed a narrow lane hard by, and entering one of the houses, mounted the rickety staircase, which brought him to a small, low room on the top-most story, where a gentle, quiet-looking young woman sat working by the dim skylight.

"'Who's that?' questioned a feeble voice from the darkest corner of the wretched abode.

"'Joey,' answered the boy, with a sunny smile, as he advanced towards the place, where, stretched on a hard pallet, lay a sick child.

"'Ah, Joey!' she moaned, turning wearily on her miserable bed, 'I've been looking out for you this livelong blessed day.'

"'I couldn't come afore,' he replied, feeling in his torn pocket for the little parcel.

"'What ha' ye got there?'

"'Something for you.'

"'Something good.'

“‘Something to do you good. Look!’ and he triumphantly opened the paper, and displayed the few white grains.

“The young woman looked up anxiously. ‘Who gave you that medicine, Joey?’ she asked.

“‘I bought it myself for ’er.’

“‘Where?’

“Joey named the shop, and after some hesitation the young mother consented, saying they would not sell there aught to do her harm, and it might do her good; and the sick child eagerly swallowed it.

“‘It ain’t nice,’ she sighed, as she lay back on her pillow; ‘but I s’pose ’twill make me better. What’s that?’ she exclaimed suddenly, observing a dark mark on Joey’s thin, bare arm. ‘Was he at you again?’

“Joey nodded.

“‘Last night?’

“Another nod.

“‘What for?’

“‘I hadn’t brought him home nothink.’

“‘And what have you got for him to-night?’

“‘Nothink.’

“‘Won’t he give it to you?’

“‘Ay,’ said Joey, with a long-drawn sigh that ended like a sob, ‘that he will.’

“The little girl stretched out her thin white hands, and softly stroked his rough red ones.

“‘Poor lad!’ was all she could say to comfort him.

“‘Joey!’ said her mother suddenly, ‘it vexes me to think you spent that penny on my Nancy; ’twould ha’ saved you p’raps.’

“‘No,’ he replied, with a decisive motion of his head; ‘twould ha’ made no sort o’ difference. He said as if I didn’t bring ’im ’ome sixpence he’d flog me well, and turn me out; and when he says it, he’ll do it, whatever is —. Besides, that wasn’t for matches; a genl’mán gave it me; but he thinks I sells ’em

and spends the money on myself!’ added the boy with tears glistening in his bright dark eyes.

“‘Twere a thousand pities your poor mother married him!’

“Joey sighed, and there was a long silence.

“Well, Joey,’ said the little girl wistfully, ‘won’t you go on now wi’t?’

“‘Where was I?’ asked Joey readily.

“‘You was where they was a coming nigh the river, and the two shining ones met him.’

“‘Yes, to be sure! they had come to stand on the very brink, and ——’

“‘Was all their steel and brass things on?’ interrupted Nancy.

“‘That they was! or else they wouldn’t ha’ dared to venture.’

“‘And the Captain?’

“‘Ay, He was there too; but I don’t think Christian could ha’ been looking straight at Him when he first put his foot in the water; for he began to sink, and Hopeful had much ado to keep his head up, the water was so strong and deep. But soon he began to think o’ something as would rouse him to be brave, and that was just to say the name of his great Captain. Well, Nan, Christian cries out immediate, “Oh, I see him again!” and that instant he found ground to stand on, and was safe. On the other bank two more shining ones met ’em, and brought ’em right away to the city. You know I telt you, the story all means double, so that the river was like when folks die!’

“Nancy moved uneasily.

“‘Is it al’ays very deep?’ she asked.

“‘The Book says it just depends how much you look to the Captain. If Christian had just kep’ looking stedfast unto Jesus, he’d not have had a fear crossing.’

“‘Joey,’ whispered Nancy, after a long pause, ‘I wish He was as near me as He al’ays seems to be to you!’

“‘He is,’ said Joey confidently.

“‘I wish I’d been alive when He was down here, then I could ha’ seen Him!’

“‘Why look, Nan, there ain’t no need to see with our own eyes. S’pose now you was blind, and I comes just the same and tells you all I hears in the ragged school, you wouldn’t say “that’s never Joey;” ye’d b’lieve ’twas me, wouldn’t you?’

“‘To be sure I would.’

“‘Well, and don’t you ever hear Him, lass, and feel Him too? When you shut up your eyes, ain’t you just conscious that He is close beside you? Don’t you ever feel His love around you just like sunshine on a cold day, and his soft voice saying to your heart, “Poor little child, I love you! I have washed you from your sins in my own blood; fight a good fight, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world; suffer the little children to come unto me!” (Little children, that’s for you and me, Nan.) “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Faithful unto death, Nan. Sometimes I think I be near the shores of the river!’

“‘You ain’t like to be so nigh as me, Joey!’

“‘I dunno that. Anyway He knows, and all I’ve got to do is to serve Him true, and love Him dear, and by’n-by, when it’s all over, there’ll come the rest. Think of that, Nancy, my lass; rest for the weary, rest for the people of God, for ever and ever!’

“‘Ye mustn’t be off, must you?’ asked the little girl imploringly, as he rose.

“‘Ay, indeed; it’s black dark, and p’raps he’ll be home first if I don’t, and find me away. Good-bye to ye, Nan; rest comes at length; don’t forget. Good evening Missis!’

“The young woman, who had all this while been listening intently to their conversation, looked up to nod and smile in return to his greeting, and the little fellow gave one parting, lingering glance at the low pallet in the corner, and went away.

“Back he scampered as fast as he could across the wood-

yard to the little lonely hut at the far side. A gruff voice greeted his entrance, followed by loud stern tones of enquiry; then the outer door shut with a resounding bang, and there came muffled cries from within, heart-rending appeals for mercy, mingled with the sound of cruel blows, and muttered oaths and curses. Then the door was flung violently open, and the wounded, persecuted child thrust out into the darkness once more. It closed noisily, and was securely bolted on the inside.

“For some minutes the poor little fellow lay motionless in the deep, soft snow-drift into which he had fallen; but the damp chill easily penetrated his tattered clothing, and warned him to rise. Slowly and stiffly he got up, and groped his way along the piles of wood and faggots. Shivering and stumbling he felt his way; and guided by the dim red lights on the opposite banks of the river, at length found the entrance; and directing his steps to the narrow lane, sought the house of his little sick friend. In vain he pressed the latch; he pushed with all his strength the usually open door; it was fast shut, and securely fastened on the inside. He even ventured in his despair to give a few taps with his knuckles, but they were far too faint to arouse the sleeping inmates, and with a weary sigh the desolate boy turned away, and found his way back to the wood-yard.

“The snow was beginning to fall again. Great soft flakes, pure and white, fell round the homeless child as he seated himself on a heap of thin laths, with his suffering face turned wistfully towards the dark, silent windows of his home.

“‘When he has slept a little, he may wake sober and in better humour,’ he thought to himself as he crossed his numbed arms over his heaving chest, and stared blindly into the darkness.

“How quiet was everything around him! No sound to break the dead dread stillness but a faint hum in the far distance, the quiet gurgle of the river as it washed over the stony bank

close by, and the click and creak of the thin yielding laths as he swung his legs to and fro to preserve circulation in the intense cold.

“The hours dragged slowly on.

“For one brief moment there was a jagged rent in the leaden clouds, and the faint pale beam that shot through lighted on the little wan upturned face and snow-clad figure.

“What a tranquil brightness gleamed in those dark, quiet eyes! what a ray of glory lit the cold white brow as the quivering lips parted for a moment, and one softly-spoken whisper broke the utter stillness—

“‘He had not where to lay His head.’

“The little streak closed up; the large flakes thickened; a few minutes more of perfect silence, then the weak treble tones broke once more on the dreary night air, and in a half-whisper sweetly sang—

“‘Rest comes at length, though life be long and dreary;
The day must dawn, and darksome night be past;
Faith’s journey ends in welcome to the weary,
And heaven, the heart’s true home, will come at last.’

“‘Come at last!’ the feeble voice faltered: the last words were scarcely audible. There was no longer a stir amongst those thin rough boards, only the silent snow fell deeper and thicker, and a piercing wind arose towards morning, and gathered the whirling flakes into deep drifts; and when the cold grey light of a winter’s morn dawned on the old wood-yard, the little child was buried beneath its weight.

“The pure white pall fell straight from heaven upon the little fragile form—a fitting emblem of the gentle spirit (purified far whiter than the glistening snow) that had ascended to the abode of everlasting bliss, where rest comes at length.

“The cruel stepfather came forth to his morning’s work, and strode sleepily out of the place. Ere evening the snow had turned to rain, and a sudden thaw set in.

“It was not till twilight was drawing its gloomy mantle over the short winter’s day that the man, returning from his work, perceived the lifeless body of the child, whose untimely death lay to his charge. He turned hastily and left the spot, never to return, and not long afterwards met with a just retribution for his sins.

“Other gentler and kindlier hands laid the earthly part of little Joey in its last home.”





CHAPTER XIX.

ONE LESS.

Safe Home.

A FEW weeks after Miss Stanton's death the holidays drew to a close, and the children and their stepmother set out on their journey homewards. They returned by the evening train, which reached Oxondown about seven o'clock. Rolf and Jessie Leonard watched the long line of carriages with interest as they approached the village, and hastened on towards Stanton Villa, when the train was lost to view in the tunnel.

In one of the carriages the lamplight fell in soft red-tinted rays upon the faces of the little party, numbering one less since their departure.

The corner of the carriage Aunt Charlotte had occupied on the merry journey to the sea was now filled only with wraps and parcels. Tom lies listlessly in the next compartment; Ada sits upright in the window; opposite her is Augustus, peering gravely out at the smoky brick arch, lit here and there by a solitary lantern; Katie and Alfie are somewhat closely jammed together in the next *arm-chair*, as they call it; and beside them is Mrs. Stanton.

"Mamma," shouted Augustus, "is it not awful to think of the depth of earth above our heads, between us and the sky?" He raised his voice to make it audible above the rush and rumble of the train, but there was far more deference than formerly in his tone, and in the way he looked up and leant towards her.

She smiled her sweet, pleasant smile, but did not attempt to make herself heard above the noise.

"We are going ever so far down under Elford Park," said Tom gravely.

Little Alfred looked alarmed at the idea of being so deep in the earth, and slipped his hand into his stepmother's. It was instantly fondly clasped, and he looked up into her face confidently.

"Mamma," said Ada, "do you think Rolf and Jessie will have returned home by the time we arrive?"

Before Mrs. Stanton could reply the train rolled out into the evening sunshine, and Katie and Alfie gave a simultaneous cry of relief.

"There is Stanton Villa!" shouted Augustus; "and there is—no, it isn't—yes, it is; there's Rolf and Jessie just going in at the gate."

They all rushed to the window.

"I suppose the servants have told them we are coming home," said Ada. "Look! there they are watching the train. I am sure they are expecting us."

The pretty villa was soon out of sight, and they all returned to their seats. In five minutes afterwards they were at Oxford-down, jumping hurriedly out of the train, seeking luggage, and packing themselves into the carriage that was there waiting to meet them.

As they drove up the avenue Rolf and Jessie were standing hand in hand upon the lawn. The servants all gathered waiting in the hall.

After the greetings were over, Rolf and Jessie went home, and, hungry and tired, the little party of travellers were soon seated round the dining-room table, on which was spread a substantial supper, and then the children all collected in the drawing-room.

"Mamma," said Augustus, as she entered soon afterwards, looking grave and weary, "what shall I do to make Rolf less

afraid of me? There was Jessie courtesying as usual, and motioning to him to bow to us; and he did it readily enough till I came up, when he got red in one moment from fright, and would have run away, only that she held him fast."

"You must be very patient with him, Gus, and remember how helpless and dependent on others it makes him, to be able neither to hear nor speak."

"It is so silly of him," said Augustus gloomily, "particularly when Jessie must have explained all about that affair to him. He ought to understand I was mistaken about the money."

"Well, never mind now, Gus," said Ada; "don't be cross the very moment we come home."

"It is not a very bright 'coming home,'" said Augustus discontentedly.

"We are one less," said Alfie softly.

"Yes," said little Katie, her eyes filling with tears; "the drawing-room looks so lonely without dear Aunt Charlotte."

Mrs. Stanton took the little girl on her lap, and kissed her tenderly.

"That is just what I have been thinking of, Katie," she said.

"Well," said Ada soberly, "there might have been very few left to come home. If we had all been swept off the rock into the sea that day, only mamma and nurse would then have come safe home."

"Yes," said Mrs. Stanton; "I hope you will all remember to thank God for His goodness and mercy in sparing you all a little longer. And there is one very solemn thought I would remind you of: if God had allowed such a terrible calamity to befall me as to lose you all in one moment, would you, each of you, be now safe home in heaven?"

The children were very grave and silent.

"We can never tell when He will call us to our real home," proceeded Mrs. Stanton, "so let us be good, watchful soldiers of our King, always ready, with our full suit of heavenly armour on, to obey His orders, whether they be to fight bravely in the

ranks of His Church militant here below, or to lay down our arms and join His great Church triumphant."

"Aunt Charlotte has put off her armour now, has she not, mamma?" said Tom.

"Yes, she is enjoying the rest that He has laid up for His people."

"She is safe home," added Katie.

Alfie whispered something in Tom's ear.

"She is too tired," answered Tom aloud.

"For what? to tell a story is it?" asked Mrs. Stanton, smiling. "Is that what little Alfie wants?"

"Yes, mamma," he replied, blushing.

"It is rather early for you to go to bed yet," said Mrs. Stanton, "so I shall try and tell you one called

Safe Home.

"My presence shall go with thee."—Exodus xxxiii. 14.

"The 7.20 p.m. train had just come in. What a bustle ensued beneath the glass roof of Westbury station! what a running to and fro, and rushing hither and thither! Little Lucy Fraser was awoke out of a comfortable sleep by the noise and fuss that was going on around her; and the surprised blue eyes were no sooner opened than they were totally extinguished by Sally the nursemaid popping her best hat on her head with the front bow behind, and the long broad ribbons that ought to have drooped gracefully over her curls dangling down in such a disagreeable manner over her face that she scarcely knew where she was, till somebody beside her caught her up in a hurry, and thrust her into the arms of a tall porter. Then she found herself lifted high in the air, and set down in safety on the platform. Oh, what unpleasant ribbons! Lucy managed to push them aside, and peep out just in time to see nurse's stout figure squeezing through the carriage-door, one hand clutching the window-frame, the other tightly grasping the porter's shoulder.

How carefully she set her foot on the step, lightly at first, and then more heavily as she found it would bear! and finally, after long hesitation, and a frightened glance at the engine, which was puffing and gasping, throwing volumes of white steam into the glass roof, in a frantic state to be off again, poor nurse ventured the other foot on the platform, and quite rivalled her enemy the engine in puffing and gasping as she held out her arms for baby, who was carefully handed to her by Sally.

“Then the tall porter was again in requisition, and little sister Agnes delighted with quite a flying leap; then Bobbie, who insisted on getting out by himself, and after a great fight with Sally in the railway carriage, was carried off bodily by the officious porter, and put down by Lucy’s side literally sobbing with indignation. Sally, with her big basket, jumped out, ignoring even the aid of the steps. And who can describe what occurred in the next five minutes! Sally’s pursuit after the luggage; the frightened Agnes holding by nurse’s dress; baby crying lustily; Lucy’s face lost in her ribbons, her little hands clasped together as she repeated over and over to herself the little verse learned that morning before starting from London—‘My presence shall go with thee.’

“And worst of all Bobbie totally disappearing nobody could tell where, and being found at last following a fat old lady, whom (so absorbed was he in the busy scene around him) he had mistaken for nurse. And little Agnes finding she had left her doll in the railway carriage, having forgotten poor Belinda’s existence till the train was actually moving off, hid her tearful face in nurse’s shawl that no one might see her streaming tears and think her naughty. But, oh! how frightened they all were when the porter said there was still time to get it, and jumped on the step of the train while in motion, till nurse screamed in terror, and he leaped off laughing heartily. But it was no laughing matter to poor Lucy as she peeped anxiously through those awkward ribbons, to assure herself he had not been killed on the spot; and it was with the greatest difficulty she restrained

her tears through the fuss that followed, till at length she found herself wedged tightly between nurse and Sally in a fly that swayed to and fro from the weight of luggage on the top, and was so packed inside with bandboxes, parcels, and baskets that it was impossible to see through what kind of place they were passing.

"Little Lucy sat very still; her thoughts were far away from the discomforts that surrounded her; she was thanking God in her heart that the long troublesome journey was nearly at an end, and felt a happy consciousness that His presence had indeed gone with them.

"The others were not so patient.

"*'I 'spect this is a town,'* said Bobbie, fidgeting about, and trying to pull away the numerous obstructions that baulked his curiosity. *'The wheels are on a rough pavement, that is why they rattle so.'*

"Poor tired Agnes said, *'P'raps it is,'* with a half-smothered sigh, and then her pale cheeks suddenly became quite red, as she complained that the strapfull of umbrellas was crushing her legs. *'You'll have to bear it then, and be a good child,'* said Sally sharply; *'you're no worse off than anybody else.'*

"*'Poor deary,'* said nurse, holding up a bandbox that threatened to come down on baby's head; *'try and push them up towards Master Bobbie there.'*

"*'I can't,'* said Agnes, winking away two bright tears, *'they are stuck fast.'*

"*'Move a bit, Sally,'* said nurse reproachfully. *'Master Bobbie dear, you'll awake baby.'*

"*'I can't help it,'* said Bobbie, pulling off his hat that his head might better fit into a peep-hole he had discovered between the handles of a basket.

"*'I say, we are out of the town now, and there is a wide flat place beyond the fields as blue as the sky. It can't be the sea, can it? Oh, Agnes, Lucy, I do wish you could see it, dancing and glistening in the sun!'*

“‘Hush—sh—sh!’ whispered nurse softly; but it was too late; the loud voice had disturbed baby’s slumbers, and his sleepy eyes were no sooner open than they winkled up again, and he began to cry, and was forthwith handed to Sally over Lucy’s head, to enable nurse to use both hands to arrange the packages in a less dangerous manner.

“Sally danced him up and down as well as the narrow limits would allow, and the wailing cry had but just ceased when there was an involuntary scream from Lucy, who cried that something was down her neck.

“‘A spider,’ said Sally, with a grim smile.

“‘Not a wasp?’ exclaimed nurse anxiously.

“‘No, it’s too big, and so, *so* cold,’ said the child shivering. ‘Oh, nurse, quick, quick, take him out!’

“‘A toad,’ suggested Bobbie gravely.

“Nurse unfastened the blue pelisse as fast as her nimble fingers could unhook it, and in the tucker of Lucy’s frock lay Sally’s glass cuff-stud.

“Bobbie laughed merrily, and even nurse smiled as she replaced the little dress again, and bestowed a hearty kiss on the pale, weary face that was now all smiles again.

“‘It must have dropped when I took baby,’ said Sally, giving him back to nurse, and replacing it in her cuff. ‘What a little goose you are to be sure, to make such a fuss about nothing!’

“‘You wouldn’t say it was nothing if it had been yourself,’ said Bobbie, nodding his curly head. ‘I do wish it had been you instead of Lucy, for you have been as cross as two sticks ever since we left London this morning!’

“What Sally would have retorted must be left to the imagination to conjecture, for at that moment the fly drew up before a pretty sea-side villa, and the door was thrown open by a short, merry-looking gentleman, whom the children hailed as ‘papa!’ And, oh, how much better mamma looked when children and nurses crowded into the little sitting-room! There she sat quite upright on the sofa, and a pink glow brightened

her usually pale cheeks, that none of them had seen for many a day, as she held out her arms for baby. Nurse and Sally went off to see the luggage taken down, and then the little ones capered and danced round the sofa with delight, all the fatigue and worry of the journey forgotten in the pleasure of being with her again. Every one talked together, Bobbie the loudest and fastest of all, till papa came in and sent them off in Sally's care to the nursery to get ready for tea. Tea in the dining-room to-night, instead of the nursery! What a treat! They all bore more patiently than usual with the brushing and rubbing Sally saw fit to administer, and a short time afterwards were seated round the table, mamma smiling at them from her sofa near the window, and papa sitting next to little Lucy, who was at the head of the table imagining she was pouring out tea, though in reality it was papa who bent the heavy urn and held the hot teapot, while the little girl, with a face of supreme importance, her cheeks glowing with pleasure, poured in the rich cream, and picked out the largest pieces of glistening sugar.

"For a while they were far too busy to think of talking. But by-and-by Bobbie, whose tongue was so long—papa had often suggested taking a little bit off the end of it—began again as fast as ever.

"‘I say, mamma, it was such a horrid journey, you can't think, the train was just like an oven; I put my hand on the seat, and it was actually burning!’

"‘Not *burning*,' suggested Agnes timidly; ‘for there was no smoke!’

"‘Bobbie's descriptions are generally *all* smoke!’ said papa smiling.

"‘Well, it was as hot as hot could be,’ said Bobbie colouring; ‘and there was a horrid old man who peeped in half a dozen times,——’

"‘Only twice,’ whispered Agnes.

"‘And at last opened the door and got in,’ proceeded Bobbie, without heeding the interruption. ‘I suppose there was no

room anywhere else, but he was as grumpy as ever he could be, and complained to nurse because I touched him with my foot! Wasn't it a shame?

“‘You *whited* his coat with your dusty boot,’ interposed his little sister again.

“‘Cross old fellow! he got as red as possible, and looked at me over his spectacles as if he should like to eat me; and Sally caught me up in her arms and put me down between her and nurse, where I could not even stir.’

“‘Very wise of Sally,” observed papa; ‘it must have been a very fidgety little foot to have got up on the seat. I confess I am not much surprised at the poor old gentleman. I should have felt the same myself.’

“‘*You* wouldn't have been cross, papa. Besides, he wasn't a bit like you. He hadn't a nice, good-natured face, and such bright black eyes, and such a moustache, and such curly ——’

“‘There, Bobbie, that will do; spare us a description of my charms. Have my little girls nothing to say?’

“‘It was a very hot and uncomfy day,’ said Agnes sighing; ‘but it does not matter now. It is so very nice to be safe home, papa.’

“Little Lucy, who had been all this while eating in silence, was now gazing out on the blue sky, and bluer sea that sparkled in the evening sunlight.

“‘Where have my Lucy's thoughts flown?’ asked mamma gently.

“‘I was thinking of what Agnes said,’ replied Lucy, blushing and looking down; ‘and—and—mamma, do you think we shall say that in heaven?’

“‘My darling, I have no doubt we shall feel in heaven that the sorrows and trials we have passed through on earth are light in comparison with the eternal weight of glory we shall then enjoy. If you have all finished tea, come round my sofa, and we shall have one little talk together, before all those sleepy, tired eyes are fast closed for the night.’

“They all gathered round her, and papa went out to smoke.

"Bobbie perched himself on the back of the sofa ; Agnes sat on the end of it ; and Lucy took a little footstool by her mother's side.

" ' Safe home,' said mamma, smiling as she looked round on the three little faces she loved so tenderly ; ' won't you all remember to thank God for this, when you kneel to say your evening prayer to-night ?'

" ' Yes, mamma,' whispered Lucy softly.

" ' Think, my children, of the many dangers of various kinds you have escaped to-day. We often hear of such terrible accidents ; and here are all my precious ones brought home to me in safety. We must all go to sleep with very thankful hearts, and try more than ever to please our most kind and loving Father in heaven, in every one of our little thoughts, deeds, and words. *Words*, my Bobbie, remember that ; I was very sorry to hear the little exaggerations you made use of just now.'

" ' But, mamma, Agnes is always bothering and interrupting me when I speak, just as if I was telling real lies.'

" ' And is such exaggeration quite true, my Bobbie ?'

" The little boy blushed, and hesitated.

" ' Whatever is not strictly true is decidedly untrue. To be faithful in little things, Bobbie, is the real way to be faithful in great matters. These lesser violations of conscience will deaden its influence in a time of greater temptation, and make you yield more easily.'

" ' I am sorry, mamma,' said Bobbie penitently ; ' and indeed, *indeed*, I did not mean to annoy that old gentleman. He needn't have been so cross, and Sally so tiresome, and nurse too, and every one.'

" ' And who the most vexatious and provoking of all ?' asked mamma, looking up at him with an arch smile.

" ' I was, mamma,' he replied frankly ; ' I know I was. It was so hot, and long, and stupid, and somehow little bothers put me out dreadfully.'

“‘Do you know why?’

“‘No, mother.’”

“‘Because you quite forget who sends them to try you. If a great misfortune happened, you would at once think “God sends it;” but the lesser ones seem to you to come of themselves; therefore they are very hard to bear patiently. If to-day you had thought to yourself, God sent this bright sunshine. How good of Him not to send us rain and storm for our journey! But though the sunshine looks so cheerful, and makes all the hills, and trees, and fields, and rivers, that seem to fly past the windows, look very bright and beautiful, yet it makes me feel very tired and hot. Well, God sent me this little trial to bear for Him. He is watching over me, and if I look up to Him in my heart, He is ready and willing to help me to bear it patiently and cheerfully. This thought will take half the trial away from you, and so make the journey not only lighter to bear for yourself, but far pleasanter to every one around you. It would also add to your joy and thankfulness, when through His mercy and loving care you arrived safely at home. How ready would your little heart then be to offer up its tribute of gratitude!’”

“‘Mamma,’ whispered Lucy, “I learned a little verse (part of one, I mean) this morning before we came away; it was, “My presence shall go with thee.” It gave me such very happy thoughts.’”

“‘It is a most precious little sentence, my child; a truly happy thought that God’s presence is with His people where-soe’er they go. Hereafter, in His bright heaven, when we look back on the little thorns and briers that beset our way on earth, the recollection will inspire our song of praise, and make tenfold more precious those two sweet words—“Safe home.”’”





CHAPTER XX.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE.

Tried but Trustful.

“**I** CANNOT bear to see mamma look like that,” cried Tom, about a fortnight after their return home.

“How do you mean?”

“Oh, so white, and thin, and patient.”

“It is no wonder,” said Augustus anxiously.

“Has not mamma written to ask her brother about him?” asked Ada.

“Yes; but we can’t get the answer for ever so long.”

“I can’t think of any reason for papa not writing,” said Ada sadly.

“There can be only one reason,” said Tom, turning away to hide his tears,” at least nurse says so. She said this morning she wondered how mamma could keep on hoping.”

“It is the suspense that wears her out,” said Gus; “to see the bright flush on her cheek when the postman knocks, and the way it fades, fades away till she is quite pale, when no letter is brought in.”

“Yes,” added Ada, “and the way she takes up the newspaper the moment it comes in to read the accounts shows how uneasy she is.”

“She excites herself so much,” said Gus sighing, “no wonder she is ill.”

"And yet she does not give up hope."

"No," said Augustus; "I believe she thinks it is wrong to give up hoping; and so it is."

"I think so too," said Ada, exerting herself to speak cheerfully. "Let us not give up; after all, there may be a dozen reasons why papa can't write."

"Of course," said Gus decidedly. "I tell you what, we shall get some crimson cloth and evergreens, and make a 'Welcome Home' to put over the gate."

"Not evergreens," said Tom, brightening up at the idea, "because papa may not be home for a little while, and they would look horrid if they were withered."

"There is a roll of crimson cloth in the bottom of the wardrobe in the lobby; I shall ask mamma if we may take it; and there is some cotton wool there too. I have seen such pretty letters made of it. Shall we try it?"

"Do," said Gus, quite gaily. "Run off, and ask leave; I'll help to cut out the letters."

Little Katie's large, wistful eyes looked gravely from one to the other as they spoke, wondering how they could feel so happy and hopeful. When Ada was gone she stole away into the house, peeped into the drawing-room, and finding it empty, went softly upstairs. As she passed Mrs. Stanton's room she heard Ada's voice within, begging and pleading to make the arch. She listened for a moment to the sad, low tones that acceded to the request, and unable to control her agitation, rushed off to her own room.

Some time afterwards Mrs. Stanton, passing down the corridor in search of the children, saw the door of Katie's room ajar, and looking in, she found the little girl kneeling by the open window, with folded hands, and upraised eyes streaming with tears. Unwilling to disturb the child, she tried to withdraw unperceived; but the slight movement reached Katie's quick ears. She looked up, and colouring crimson, rose to her feet.

"My dear little one," said Mrs. Stanton, coming forward, and folding her in a fond embrace.

Katie sobbed, and hid her face on her stepmother's shoulder.

"Mamma," she whispered, "is he never, never coming back?"

"Who, papa?"

Katie only clung closer to her.

"I trust he is, Katie," she answered; but her voice faltered, and the child felt a tear fall on her forehead.

"Mamma, dear mamma, is there not a little hope still?"

"I trust so; I believe so, Katie. This long suspense and hope deferred is very trying; but we know who sent the trial, don't we, darling?"

"Yes," she answered, raising her earnest, tearful eyes to her stepmother's face; "God sent it to us; but we can't be very frightened when we know how much He loves us. Don't you think He is sorry to have to send us such a long, long waiting, mamma?"

"In all their affliction He was afflicted," said Mrs. Stanton softly. "'We have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'"

Katie lay very silently in her arms, and both their thoughts were far away while they watched the other children running to and fro from the arbour to the house, collecting materials for their work.

At length Augustus looked up.

"There is mamma and Katie in the window! I say, mamma," he shouted, making a trumpet of his hand, "we are setting to work now; will you come down and tell us a story?"

"Yes, dear," she answered; "Katie and I will meet you in the arbour."

Off they rushed, and were hard at work, and ready to receive them both when they came out. Mrs. Stanton took Katie on her lap, and began

Tried but Trustful.

"Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast."—PSALM lvii. 1.

"The in-coming tide was rippling smoothly over the sand and pebbles in one of the smallest and most remote bays or creeks on the West coast of England.

"On a rock hard-by sat a youth smoking a short, black pipe, and gazing with serene satisfaction on the heaving waters.

" 'This time to-morrow,' he muttered half-aloud as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, and proceeded to provide it with a fresh supply of tobacco. 'This time to-morrow I shall be—dear knows where—on the broad, boundless ocean.'

"The reflection seemed to afford him extreme contentment; and as he replaced his pipe in his mouth, he bestowed a friendly nod on the bright glistening sea, and winked familiarly at the frothy wavelets that gurgled at his feet. Then rising slowly and lazily, he thrust both hands deep into his pockets, and leisurely betook himself towards a little cottage under a neighbouring cliff. The door stood open, and as his tall figure threw a shadow across the threshold, a woman looked up from a little black trunk she was busily packing, and uttered an exclamation of mingled relief and pleasure.

" 'I was almost afraid, Jack dear, I should not see you again for hours,' she said in a sweet-toned voice, and a smile lit up her care-worn countenance.

" 'You are always worrying yourself about me,' returned her son somewhat roughly. 'Twill be a blessing to you, mother, when I'm off your hands.'

"The mother's face was quickly averted. She made no reply, but continued to fold neatly together some warm woollen socks, and squeeze them into every corner and crevice of the well-arranged, well-filled box.

" 'What's that?' asked her son, kicking the side of the trunk

where a little piece of shining black cover and gilt leaves showed itself.

“‘Your Bible, dear.’

“‘Mine?’

“‘Yes,’ she answered, looking up at him with a hesitating, enquiring smile; ‘I bought it for you yesterday.’

“‘I wish you’d told me you had money to waste,’ was his ungracious rejoinder. ‘I’d have liked a silk tie or two a deal better.’

“The widow’s gentle face was bent again. She was dexterously raising a pile of new flannel shirts. From beneath them she drew a little card-box, and opening it, with a wistful glance handed him a darkblue silk necktie.

“Jack could not but look gratified. His admiration and pleasure chased the sadness from his mother’s face. She quickly finished her preparations for his long voyage, gazing with lingering affection on the good stock of habiliments and comforts her love and care had provided for him; then rising slowly, locked it, and gave him the key.

“He pocketed it in silence, and watched her as she got ready the evening meal; the last they would partake of together for a long time, perhaps even for ever.

“It might be the thought of this contingency that sent a thrill of compunction through the wild, wayward youth, who for years had caused this gentle mother the keenest pain and sorrow. But so little did he understand or know the depth of that mother’s love, he hastened to check the momentary softened feeling by the thought, that when once he was away all would be well with her; she could not but be happier when rid of him who had always given her so much grief.

“Their last meal was a very silent one; and in the parting that followed little was said by either of them. The mother’s heart was too full for utterance; and the son’s ideas too much bent on getting away as quickly as possible, and having the scene over. Yet, as he ran round the cliff with his box on his

shoulder, and a smile on his face, something very like a sigh came from the depths of his heart ; for the mother's last broken words of blessing, hardly listened to with his outward ears, re-echoed for some time within ; and while he tried to shake off what he was pleased to consider an unmanly weakness, he half-formed a resolution to glance into the little Bible in any moment of danger or trouble, and see for himself what there was in it that had ever seemed a balm of consolation and support to his mother in all her griefs and trials.

"Meanwhile the widow stood upon the threshold of their little home, gazing out upon the blue horizon with raised eyes and parted lips, praying with the earnestness of her whole heart for the son whose wild, ungovernable disposition had been her greatest trial during all the latter years of her life.

"Twilight gathered slowly that autumn evening, and darkness at length settled down over the quiet sea. The cottage door was shut ; the firelight gleamed on the well-furnished walls ; the yellow rays from a solitary candle fell aslant over the time-worn pages of a large Bible ; and bending thoughtfully over the sacred volume sat the lonely widow, feeding her hungering, thirsting soul with the bread and water of life, cleansing and brightening her shining armour, and fastening with tighter bands the shield of perfect faith and confidence in her great Commander.

"Every day during the following week she walked to the next village, two miles further up the coast, to avail herself of the kind permission of her old friend the principal stationer and bookseller of the little town, who took in several of the daily newspapers, and invited the poor widow to make use of them, and so enabled her to watch for reports concerning the *Louisa Jane*, the vessel in which her son had been offered a berth.

"Not many days elapsed ere her anxious eyes were gladdened by reading of the safe arrival of the *Louisa Jane* at Southampton, and her departure from that port for the west coast of Africa.

“As she wended her way home that bright day—sunshine around her glistening like diamonds over the broad blue sea, and sunshine within her heart lighting it up with love and gratitude to her God—she prayed more trustfully than ever that as his heavenly Father had kept him so far on his way from bodily ill or harm, so He would shield his heart from evil, and lead it by the influence of His Holy Spirit to the great Propitiator for all sin, that it might be cleansed and sanctified, and made meet for His home in glory.

“And now, though there was little hope of further intelligence for some weeks, still she went to the shop of her good friend, and searched the news-columns diligently, anxiously.

“A few more days passed away ere in the daily journal there was a long paragraph, headed, ‘Total loss of the barque *Louisa June*, and five of the crew,’ &c.

“With throbbing heart and tear-dimmed eyes, Mrs. Seaton read of the fearful hurricane the ill-fated barque had encountered in the Bay of Biscay, and of the narrow escape of thirteen of the crew in one of the boats. After enduring terrible sufferings, they had been picked up by an out-bound vessel, and landed at Lisbon. The names of the survivors had not as yet been accurately ascertained.

“Strong in her trust in God, the widow doubted not but that her only son was amongst the saved; and fixing her trembling hopes on her Saviour, she returned to her home.

“‘Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me; for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast,’ was the cry of her heart as she walked along the glittering sands. ‘He has promised, “When they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” “Oh, I will trust in the Lord; for with Him is mercy, and plenteous redemption.”’

“Time passed on slowly and wearily, and one sad day brought the names of the survivors.

“With straining eyes, and burning hope and dread, she

glanced down the long list of 'saved ;' his name was not among them, and then one quick, agonized glance further down at the 'lost'—

"JOHN TAYLOR,
"PAUL HASTE,
"THOMAS FOWLES,
"WILLIAM JONES,
"JACK SEATON.

"She did not utter a cry or groan, but laid the paper gently down, and silently went away—away to her solitary home, to her desolate fireside, one word, one terrible doom resounding in her ear—'lost !'

"Her former trust and firm hope seemed now to add tenfold to the force of the blow. Lost, for time and for eternity ! Awful thought ! To meet no more on earth, was sad and lonely to her whose whole heart was devotedly attached to him ; but to meet no more for ever !

"The poor widow bowed her head. No tear came now, no sigh, no prayer to heaven. She sat disconsolate by her fireside, pale, despairing, mute, and motionless.

"The cuckoo-clock struck ten, and, more from the force of long habit than with any definite intention, she drew her Bible towards her. The leaves fell open at the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, and her eyes fell on the ninth verse : 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

"'Yes ; truly the dealings of God are incomprehensible, unfathomable to poor human nature ; but they are not the less wise, and loving, and merciful.' Life and animation seemed to return to the tried heart that had almost seemed to stand still in its agony. Now it beat and thrilled again as she remembered who had done it. It was no chance stroke, no random shaft, that had felled her to the earth. This severe chastening was from the hand of her God, the Lord who loved her, who had

given Himself for her. His thoughts had not been as her thoughts, or His ways as her ways. *Her* will had been, that he should have been led step by step to find a Saviour; *her* thought, that he should have come home safely to tell her of his new-found faith, his perfect joy. But *God's* will had been, that he should be suddenly cut off in the full prime and strength of his early manhood; *His* thought—what? She knew not for certain; but why had she been so hasty to conclude the worst? why limit His almighty power and infinite mercy? There had been ample time during the day and night of storm and danger for that beloved soul to have been saved for ever; ample time for her many prayers to have received abundant reply. Ah! dared she longer doubt her Father's tender care and untiring love, undeniable proofs of which were around and within her?

“Beneath those threatening black clouds, amid the boiling surge and mountain waves, tempest-tossed, water-logged, sinking, a hand had been stretched out to her boy, and a voice beside him had said, ‘It is I; be not afraid,’ and had taken him into the ark of everlasting joy and felicity.

“The mother saw it all by the clear eye of faith, and sinking on her knees, she blessed God for His goodness, with no more doubt or hesitation in her trustful heart than if her own boy stood beside her at that moment and recounted the scene.

“And so that trying night passed in unbroken slumber, and the next few days sped tranquilly on. And when she needed to go to the neighbouring village for supplies (for the newspapers no longer contained any interest for her), her friends and neighbours marvelled at the sweet, serene expression on her face; and observing how it was unaltered and unchanged by the dreadful catastrophe, remarked with admiration the lustre of her celestial armour, and said Widow Seaton lived more in heaven than on earth. But as her spirit, stayed as it was upon her God, strengthened and increased in the beauty of holiness, her bodily health faded apace, and the time drew on when she could scarcely creep from her bed to the chair by the fireside;

and no one knowing of her illness, she was alone in her weakness—alone, yet not alone; for One stood by her in that hour of need, and shed a glory round her dying bed that lit up even the dark aspect of the river of death, and all dread or fear was cast out by her perfect confidence in His everlasting love.

“One day when the end was very near, and the dim eyes could discern no word of comfort in the old Bible that was open by her side, she lay back on the bed, and closing her heavy eyelids, had recourse to her well-stored memory for the blessed words of assurance and peace. Her pale lips moved softly as she repeated aloud the six comforting verses of the twenty-third Psalm; then returning once more to the fourth verse, she repeated it again and again: ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’

“There was a deep, broken sob in the little room, that roused her with a start to raise her head and gaze around. She had not far to look. Beside her knelt a youth whose dark head was buried deep in the bed-clothes, while he strove, but in vain, to stifle the heart-broken sobs that rent his bosom.

“It needed no second glance to recognise those dark curls, the blue woollen jersey, the fast-clenched hand.

“She laid her slender white fingers upon his head, and feebly tried to raise it. He looked up. What a depth of bitter sorrow and remorse thrilled those eyes that met hers so fully, so lovingly! She smiled faintly, but manifested no surprise.

“‘Mother! mother! speak—one word!’

“‘*He* is yours,’ she whispered; not enquiringly, but as a fact long well known to her.

“‘Yes, mother, I have indeed sought and found Him, but how ——’

“‘He told me so,’ she answered softly. ‘If we ask anything according to His will He heareth us, and God willeth not the death of a sinner.’

“‘It was on the night of the storm,’ said the young man,

hiding his face once more, 'I knew you were praying for me; and oh, mother, I prayed too! We three made a raft; two were lost, washed away, and I had only just time to snatch my Bible before we three deserted her. She was sinking fast, and it was all any of us dared to take away. I read it to 'em, and——' He paused a moment, then continued: 'We were picked up by a foreign vessel bound for Rio Janeiro. I took the very first steamer leaving that port, and worked my passage home.'

"His mother lay tranquilly listening to his tale, lingering on the borderland of her eternal home, waiting only to hear of the abundant answer to her many prayers, the entire fulfilment of her long-cherished hopes; waiting but to murmur over her long-lost loved one a few earnest words of blessing, prayer, and thanksgiving; then the silver cord was gently loosed, and the tried spirit winged its flight to the land of everlasting bliss, where faith and trust are changed into perfect sight."





CHAPTER XXI.

TEMPER'S VICTORY.

Under a Usurper.

“**I** HATE being in nurse’s care ; she is always watching us, and tormenting us. Why did not mamma say she would trust to ourselves to be good, as she is not well enough to look after us herself?”

It was Augustus that spoke, in a very discontented tone, and an angry glance after the receding form of nurse, who had just been lecturing them on making too much noise.

“Perhaps mamma remembers the last time she said she trusted us to take care of ourselves,” said Tom, “and is now afraid to do so.”

“Well, there is one comfort ; if mamma had depended on me to be good, I should have had to try, whereas now I shall be as bad as I please. There is Rolf ! By the way I wanted to make friends with him. How shall I set about it?”

“Go up, and smile, and nod your head at those geraniums ; as much as to say, ‘Are they not very pretty ?’ I saw Jessie do that the other day, and Rolf seemed to understand perfectly, and began to point out those most in bloom with the prettiest colours.”

Thus instructed, Augustus went cautiously towards the garden boy ; but his doubtful steps and stealthy mode of approaching immediately alarmed Rolf. He put down the watering-pot he held in his hand, and placed one foot a little in advance of the other, ready for flight. Augustus stopped short when he per-

ceived it, and flushed with anger. This increased Rolf's fear; he looked hastily round, evidently seeking a place of safety in case of danger. Augustus raised his hand, and with an authoritative gesture motioned him to stand still till he came up. The upraised hand and indignant face was enough to complete Rolf's discomfiture. He sped away as fast as he could towards a little grove of trees, beyond a field at the back of the house; and all the children burst out laughing at Augustus' face of disappointed fury.

"How can you be so foolish, Gus?" cried Ada. "Anyone would be frightened to see you look as you do now!"

"He does it for insolence," muttered Augustus through his closed teeth.

"He has every reason to be afraid of you," said Ada boldly. "Can't you wait patiently, and make friends with him little by little? He is so quick and intelligent, he would soon find out that you never meant to harm him."

"He thinks you bear him malice ever since you took his money by mistake," said Tom.

"I bear him malice?" echoed Augustus angrily. "It is he who bears me malice! He sees how much his pretended terror annoys me, and he does it on purpose."

"He is really afraid," said Alfred earnestly.

"Well, if he is, I shall give him cause for fear before the day is over."

"Oh, don't ——"

"Shut up," said his brother rudely; "I shall show him I am not to be trifled with. He keeps up this old grudge against me week after week, and has the impertinence to reject all my attempts to make peace; but I shall have my revenge yet."

And turning away from them with crimson brow and flashing eyes, he walked off in the direction of the little grove in which Rolf had by this time taken refuge.

"What, oh, what will he do to him?" cried Alfred, clasping his hands despairingly. "Will no one stop him?"

"Oh, Ada, remember Rolf can't speak, he can't hear; he will be terrified."

"It is a shame for Augustus!" exclaimed Tom indignantly.

"If you think so, why don't you stop him?" said Ada scornfully.

"It would be of no use. Once Gus gets into a real towering rage like that, there is no doing anything with him."

They loitered about the garden, feeling restless, anxious, and unhappy, till little Katie stepped out of the open drawing-room window with a story-book in her hand.

"Where have you been?" asked Ada.

"Reading to mamma."

"Is it out of that little stupid story-book of yours?"

"Mamma said she liked to hear it."

"If she did it was only to please you that she said it."

Katie looked disappointed for a moment, then her clouded face lighted up.

"Mamma would never say what she did not feel to please anybody," she said confidently.

"Oh, Katie," said Alfred mournfully, "such a dreadful thing has happened! Rolf vexed Gus by being afraid of him, and Gus said he would have his revenge."

"And where is he?" asked the child, looking frightened.

"They are both in the grove yonder."

Katie raised her earnest face to the quiet sky for a moment.

"I will go and look for them," she said softly, and followed the two boys in the same direction.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom," said Ada, "to be afraid to go after Gus. Look how brave Katie is."

"I need not be more ashamed than you," retorted Tom. "You are older than I am, and have a great deal more power over Gus than I have."

"I can't mix myself up in boys' quarrels," said Ada with something of her old conceited manner.

"It is all nurse's fault from beginning to end," said Tom.

"The scolding she gave us, just for doing nothing but talking loudly put Gus out of humour, and that was the beginning of all the mischief."

"There is Gus," cried Alfred suddenly, "coming out of the wood alone. Katie is meeting him half way. Look! he turns away. He won't answer her. I wonder if he found Rolf."

They watched the two approaching in silence till they came within earshot, when Ada's curiosity could be restrained no longer, and she called out,

"Did you find Rolf?"

Gus glared at her resentfully, but made no reply.

"He didn't," said Tom in a low voice; "I am sure he did not."

"Why do you think so?" asked Alfred in a whisper.

"He would not be so full of pent-up anger if he had boxed Rolf's ears," said Tom sagely; and Alfred was greatly relieved by the surmise.

"What are you two whispering about?" shouted Augustus.

"Nothing," answered Tom.

"Is that true, Tom?" cried his brother in a stentorian voice that brought nurse again from the house to scold them for being so thoughtless and unkind.

Mrs. Stanton had but just fallen asleep, and was now awakened by the noise they made.

"You are the worst of all, Master Gus," she said in conclusion.

"I shall make as much noise as I please," said Gus gloomily.

"Am I to give that message to your mamma, sir?"

"Do, if you like," he retorted; "and you may add that I wish she would give us her own scoldings; we don't like 'em to come second-hand from you."

Nurse looked highly offended.

"Very well, sir," she said, in a tone of suppressed indignation; "she shall hear every word you have just said. I hoped the last

few weeks that you was coming to some good, but I see you are just as bad as ever you was before she came ;” and so saying nurse walked off.

Augustus’ anger suddenly cooled down. Her last words reminded him of the many new resolutions he had lately made, and how the report of his impertinent answers would grieve his stepmother, and add to her sorrow and anxiety.

Ada saw the change of expression in his face, and proposed a walk. He complied, and soon tried to talk and laugh as usual ; but there was a constraint in his manner, that told he could not be quite happy till he had seen Mrs. Stanton.

On their return home they all went immediately to her sitting-room upstairs, where they found her lying on the sofa.

Before she could say a word, Augustus was beside her, telling her how much he regretted what he had said.

She spoke to him in her usual low, gentle, reproving tones.

“Yes, mamma,” he answered ; “I knew I was wrong, but I was in such a horrid temper, and everything came together to vex me. Must I tell nurse ?”

“I think you ought certainly.”

“How nasty ! Will it do to-night, mamma ?”

“It would be much better to go now.”

He made a wry grimace, but walked off, and speedily returned, bright and smiling again.

“Why is it that nurse’s scoldings are so much harder to bear than yours, mamma ?” asked Ada.

“Because,” replied Augustus, before she could speak, “mamma is the rightful sovereign of this house ; nurse was only a usurper.”

“Not a *usurper*,” said Mrs. Stanton, smiling ; “for I asked her to take the reins of government for a few hours.”

“And instead of holding us in quietly,” said Augustus, laughing, “she jerked the curb-rein, and goaded us all to anger.”

"Yes," said Tom, gravely nodding his head, "there is a great deal in knowing how to hold them properly."

"Especially when one is driving five-in-hand," added Ada.

"Mamma," said Augustus candidly, "I was under a real usurper to-day, who held the reins so steadily that I actually ran in harness for him for more than half an hour without knowing it."

"Who was that, Gus?"

"Temper. What a capital whip the old fellow is."

"Suppose I tell you all a story now, and call it

Under a Usurper.

"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

2 CORINTHIANS vi. 2.

"In a pleasant sitting-room, lighted only by a glowing fire, sat an elderly lady, busily employed in knitting a little woollen sock. The red light flickered fitfully on her smooth grey hair and pale worn face, her dark dress and thin wrinkled fingers. Opposite her, seated on a corner of the fender, with both hands held up to ward off the burning glare from his face, sat a boy about fourteen years of age, with bright chestnut curls, and a grave, thoughtful expression of countenance. Both were perfectly silent, and only the busy click of the knitting-needles, and the ticking of the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece broke the stillness.

"Suddenly the door opened, and a little girl appeared, dressed in white with black ribbons, rubbing her rosy hands together, and exclaiming at the cold upstairs.

"'I was afraid I should not be ready in time after all,' she said, placing first one little foot and then the other on the warm steel fender; 'it seems so long since the carriage went to fetch him, he may be here at any moment; eh, auntie?'

"The old lady smiled and nodded. And her little niece moved away to draw the crimson curtains closer across the windows.

Then pushed the table back a little to enlarge the circle round the fire, and drew forward a few, low, comfortable-looking chairs.

“‘There,’ she exclaimed, completing these little arrangements with great satisfaction, ‘I think he will find this dear old place looking just like itself.’

“The boy muttered something that sounded like dissent, and it was not alone the effect of the fire that caused the pink tinge to deepen in his cheek.

“The little sister perceived the quick flush, and a cloud of sorrow obscured for a moment her expression of happy anticipation.

“‘I was wrong in saying so,’ she said softly and sadly. ‘Home will be very different to him.’

“‘Yes, childie,’ said the old aunt, with the slow, sweet enunciation of the Scottish accent; ‘he will miss his father far more than either of you young ones.’

“‘There he comes!’ exclaimed the boy, starting violently. ‘Don’t you hear the sound of wheels on the gravel, Ursula?’

“The little girl danced gaily out of the room, and the next moment was standing at the open hall door, her long fair hair streaming behind her as the cold north wind rushed in, and she, unmindful of the chill blast, bent eagerly forward, trying to pierce the gloom outside. The carriage curved swiftly round the broad drive, and drew up to the door. The next moment Ursula was clasped in her eldest brother’s arms, and almost carried in his close embrace to the drawing-room door, where his aunt and younger brother gave him an equally warm reception.

“The next few minutes found him seated by the old fireside he loved so well, and had so often pictured to his imagination during his long sojourn in a far distant colony.

There was much to be said and heard, the adventures of his journey to relate, and old tender memories long since gone by to be revived and alluded to by each from time to time gently,

solemnly, and sadly. The evening passed with wonderful rapidity ; and long after Ursula had been dismissed to bed, she sat coiled up in a corner of her big sofa upstairs, pondering deeply about this new brother, of whom she knew little but by the constant interest excited by his kind, brotherly letters. Nine years ago he had left home. This was a long time, when subtracted from Ursula's eleven, and left but two, during which she remembered, or perhaps only fancied she remembered, the tall, strong youth on whose broad shoulders she had more than once been perched, that she might be enabled in that exalted position to fulfil the object of her childish ambition, and touch the ceiling. But she was soon roused from these old memories by hearing 'good-night' pass between the others downstairs, the shutting of doors, and then the stillness through the house, only broken by the sound of a heavy footfall pacing up and down the room below.

"Then a cloud crossed Ursula's brow, and painful thoughts seemed to oppress her while she sat almost unconsciously listening to the firm tread below, till it ceased altogether, and she heard her eldest brother come softly upstairs. She could not resist the burning desire for another glimpse of him, and starting up, opened the door, and peeped out. He turned at the sound, and came towards her in evident surprise.

" 'Ursula.'

" 'I couldn't help it,' she whispered timidly. 'I—I—wanted to look at you again.

"He stooped to kiss the blushing little face.

" 'Good-night,' she said, with another wistful glance.

" 'Good-night,' he answered, smiling. 'I must make my little sister's acquaintance to-morrow ; we shall have a long, pleasant talk together.'

" 'Pleasant !' she echoed doubtfully ; then paused a moment. 'Giles,' she whispered, almost surprised at her own audacity in venturing to call this tall dark stranger by his Christian name, 'may I tell you something *not* pleasant ?'

“‘Certainly,’ he replied, looking surprised. ‘What is it?’

“‘Oh, to-morrow will be better!’ said Ursula, suddenly changing her mind. “You are tired. I forgot. Good-night.” And with a slight smile and a reassuring nod, the golden head disappeared, and the door closed.

“The brother stood for a moment in indecision, and then went to his room.

“But all the next day passed without this promised confidence on the part of his little sister, and the next, and next, till Giles almost forgot all about it; but not so Ursula. For many months a terrible anxiety had weighed upon her; but she had long since learned on whom to cast her cares, and as she prayed, and hoped, and waited, she had looked forward to the arrival of this new brother, whose help and advice she earnestly desired. And now that he was come, and was with her every day, ready and willing to hear it, her heart failed her, and she knew not how to open the subject.

“At length Sunday came—a cold frosty day; and in the afternoon, as the twilight deepened, she found herself alone with Giles. He was seated in the arm-chair, gazing thoughtfully into the fire, and with a now-or-never feeling she suddenly began :

“‘Giles!’

“The abstracted expression fled from his face. He looked up with an expectant attention that disconcerted her. She remained silent.

“‘Did you speak, Ursula?’

“‘Yes ——’ she hesitated; ‘at least I want to ——’

“‘Come and sit here,’ he said gently, ‘and tell me all about this unpleasant subject.’

“Ursula shyly approached, and he drew her on his knee.

“‘What troubles my little sister?’ he asked kindly; and as she was still silent, not knowing how to begin, he continued, ‘What is it, Ursula? You are not afraid to tell me?’

“His voice was so gentle, he looked so kind, that the child’s

hesitation vanished, and half hiding her face in her veiling hair, she whispered, 'It's about Edgar.'

"'Ah! I had intended asking you why he was not at church this morning.'

"Ursula gazed gravely into the fire.

"'He has not been in church for the last month,' she said; then observing her brother's look of surprise, she averted her face, and exclaimed, 'Oh, Giles, that is what I wanted to tell you about!'

"'Edgar?'

"'Yes, Edgar; he is so strange, and thinks such dreadful things. Don't you observe how different he is, how silent and changed? Ah though, you can't, for you did not know him as I did; but more than a month ago Mr. Long preached a sermon, and—and——'

"'Well, dear, he said ——'

"'He said that people coming to church, and pretending to pray and praise when they lived far from God, was mockery and insult; and Edgar was so attentive (he always was, you know); but next Sunday he would not go to church, and when I tried to persuade him, he asked me, Did I wish him to come and mock and dishonour God? I said, "Certainly not," and begged him to come and serve Him; but he said he could not think of entering on a life of holiness just now, for he should not be able to continue it during his whole life; but he means to do so by-and-by, and meanwhile he was determined not to pretend or be a hypocrite. Oh, I have prayed and longed for you!'

"Giles rose, and began, as was his wont, to walk up and down the room.

"'Don't be so distressed, Ursula,' he said at length, stopping before her. 'All this is trying, and very sad, but at least it is honest. Continue to pray for him, dear.'

"At this moment Edgar entered the room, and Ursula stole away, and left the two brothers together. Giles immediately

began to speak on ordinary subjects ; and Edgar, who had felt uncomfortable at the sudden silence between his brother and sister on his entrance, was for a time doubly reserved. His taciturnity thawed considerably under the sunshine of Giles's pleasant conversation, and he became more animated than usual on the subject of his future profession.

“ ‘I am sure I should like the army best, Giles,’ he said, ‘if I could get into it.’

“ ‘I see no reason why you shouldn't.’

“ ‘The examination is difficult. If I could pass that ——’

“ ‘You would be true to your colours afterwards?’

“ ‘True! Of course I should be true as steel to my Queen and country.’

“ ‘I hope so.’

“ ‘You *hope* so, Giles! What on earth do you mean? Do you think me a rebel?’

“ ‘Why, when you voluntarily side with the rebels in one warfare, you might do the same in another.’

“ ‘I don't under ——’ He paused, and coloured deeply. ‘Ursula has been speaking to you.’

“ ‘She has.’

“ ‘About me?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘There followed a long pause.

“ ‘I don't know why you should doubt my being true, Giles,’ said Edgar at length, looking pained and hurt; ‘it is my very desire to be perfectly true and upright that makes me act as I do.’

“ ‘Yes,’ said Giles gravely; ‘there are men who desert their colours openly and audaciously, and there are secret rebels who do so surreptitiously; I admit you do not belong to the latter class.’

“ ‘Whatever I really am I will show myself to be. Would you believe it, Giles, there is a fellow at my school who sets up for being extra religious, and there is not a plot of evil or

mischievous concocted in the school that he does not take part in. It disgusts me! Can't a fellow be loyal to one cause or another? Whatever you may think of me, at least I will be true.'

"'True to whom? Not true to yourself, Edgar; you are ruining yourself, breaking the solemn promise made long ago in your behalf, and ratified with your own lips about a year ago. Not true to God; you are wilfully disobeying Him. To whom then are you true? To one who has usurped a power in the fair realms of God's earth, which He made, and pronounced to be very good; to one who has no right to your allegiance in life, and whose reward for your faithful service will be eternal death.'

"'A usurper,' repeated Edgar thoughtfully; 'you mean Satan. I should have thought you knew me well enough, Giles, to believe I shrink with horror from such an idea.'

"'Yet, Edgar, you must know well there is no neutral ground. You are yielding to him, he has usurped authority over you, and you seem to overlook the fact that God, your Maker, is your rightful owner, whether you acknowledge it or not, and to Him alone your whole service is due.'

"Edgar answered nothing. He leaned his forehead against the chimney-piece, and remained buried in thought for several minutes. 'No neutral ground' was an idea that had not occurred to him when he turned in fear from the right way, and determined to wait awhile to decide fully in his own mind before taking any course. Now he discovered that there was no such thing as *stopping* to decide, and while he thought he *waited* to consider, he was serving God's enemy, placing himself deliberately under a usurper.

"'It is a solemn thing to become a Christian,' he sighed at last; 'I dare not undertake what I feel sure I should never carry out.'

"'Not *alone* certainly, but with help.'

"'But I should forget I was dependent on Him, and try to walk alone.'

“‘Your instant fall would teach you.’

“‘I don’t want to learn by such painful experience. In fact, looking forward as I do now to a long life of health and happiness, the thought of spending all those years in the service of a holy God alarms me. I dare not enter on it with a half heart. I should do so with a whole heart and mind, or not at all at present.’

“‘But why look forward with apprehension to what God has not yet given you?’

“‘What do you mean?’

“‘I mean “a long life of health and happiness.”’

“‘I hope He will give it me, and I see every prospect of it.’

“‘What if He snatched the cup of happiness from your lips, just as you were about to take it?’

“‘Oh, that is a gloomy way of looking at things!’

“‘I do not mean to be gloomy ; I want you to look at things as they *are*, not as they *may* be ; to look them straight in the face, and instead of shrinking from the bare contemplation of a life of holiness and self-denial, to remember that God has not yet given you a long life. He has not even promised it to you. He may in His boundless mercy bestow upon you every temporal blessing, but you have no right to count upon it ; and should He send you sorrow instead, where will be the anchor of your soul, sure and steadfast, when the billows of trial overwhelm you ? The future, be it joy or sorrow, is not yours *now* ; and to use what *is* yours *now*—undeniably yours—is what I want you to do.’

“‘But if you reason like that, *nothing* is surely mine.’

“‘Yes, there is a period that belongs to you ; we know not how long, or how short it may be, but it is there, and it is yours, ay, and mine too ; that portion of your life is—Now ! Why not yield that to the service of your Redeemer, thankfully and heartily, and leave Him to take care of the future ? Go to Jesus *now*, believe on Him *now*, enlist in His service *now*, and leave the

rest to Him. He will take care of your health, your happiness, your future joys or sorrows. The present moment is all you have to do with ; and will you absent yourself from His house of prayer, desert His cause, lay down your arms, and yield that one precious moment, *Now*, to a usurper, whose only aim is to compass your destruction ?'

"Edgar hid his face in his hands, but answered nothing. Reduced to this little period, the heavenly pilgrimage did not look so formidable.

"Giles walked to the window, and appealed for help and discretion to his great Captain ; then turned back and laid his hand on his brother's shoulder.

" 'Break free from this usurper, Edgar, won't you ? and come and enter the lists against him ; flee to the great Commander for grace and strength to bear arms in His holy cause. Clothed in His bright armour, you will go bravely forth to the battle, and be more than conqueror through Him who loves you.'

"He paused a moment, but his brother spoke not, and he continued earnestly,

" 'Do not look forward with cowardly dread of falling away, but use the knowledge of your own weakness as an additional incentive to flee to His strength. He is ready to receive you, waiting to be gracious ; will you say Him nay ? He says, 'Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden ;' won't you accept His free loving invitation ?'

"Edgar's bosom heaved a deep sob. 'I will,' he whispered in a broken voice, 'God helping me. Giles, pray for me !'

. * * * * *

" 'Giles, have you spoken with him ?' It was Ursula's soft voice that whispered the question in her brother's ear, as he sat musing, about an hour after his conversation with Edgar. He put his arm fondly round his little sister, and kissed her cheek. Ursula felt that was a sufficient answer.

" 'Oh, I am so happy !' she exclaimed, clasping her hands together.

“‘You may well be happy, dear, and more than happy, *thankful*, that Edgar is now steadfastly bent on serving in the army of the King of kings, and fully perceives the awful danger of allowing himself to drift aimlessly down the stream of time “under a usurper.”’”





CHAPTER XXII.

ROLF DISAPPEARS.

Valiant for the Truth.

“**M**ASTER Tom, do you think you will be driving over to Pope’s Hollow this week?”

“I don’t know, Grimes; I am afraid mamma is not well enough.”

“You young gents are not thinking of going without her, are you?”

“Why?” asked Tom in surprise. “Is that poor Mrs. Leonard ill again? We heard she was much better.”

“So she is, I believe, sir; but the gardener cannot make out what has become of the little chap. He ran off before his work was done last night, and has not turned up since. It is so unlike him to be careless or unpunctual, we’re afraid he may be ill.”

“Oh, I can guess why!” cried Tom, suddenly brightening.

“Has Master Augustus been doing anything to him, sir?”

“He frightened him yesterday; so I daresay Rolf is afraid to show his face again.”

“Miss Katie is calling you, sir.”

Tom ran off, and met his sister on the garden walk, her little face looking seriously alarmed.

“Why, Katie, what has happened now?”

“Jessie has just been here,” said Katie, with difficulty restraining her tears. “She is so frightened about Rolf. He never came home last night, though she sat up watching for him till

near morning ; then she went to bed, feeling quite sure he must be here ; but the gardener does not know anything about him."

"Grimes seems quite uneasy about him too," said Tom gravely. "What can have happened to him?"

"Do you think he has run quite away?" asked the little girl breathlessly.

"There is no knowing what he may have done in his fright," said Tom musingly. "How sorry Gus will be!"

"Will you go and tell him?"

"No, he might be vexed ; do you go."

Katie did not like the errand ; she hesitated a little, and then went slowly and reluctantly towards the house.

"Hallo," said Gus, popping out his head from between the boughs of the horse-chestnut tree ; "what's that long face for, Katie ? Here I am, working all alone at our 'Welcome Home.' I've nearly finished the first word ; come and have a look at it."

His little sister ran up to him.

"Gus," she said gravely, after giving an admiring glance at the snow-white 'Welcome' on crimson ground. "I am afraid I haven't very good news for you."

"Never begin by startling a fellow," said Augustus, taking up a large pair of scissors, and setting to work again ; "whatever it is, out with it."

"It is that poor Rolf has quite disappeared since you went after him last evening, and can't be found anywhere."

Augustus uttered a loud exclamation of dismay, and started to his feet in an instant. Before Katie recovered from her surprise, he was gone from the arbour, and was running across the field towards the grove as fast as his long legs could carry him. Katie stood a moment in doubt, and then ran after him.

Just as she entered the dark little wood Augustus emerged from it, dragging Rolf after him by the collar of his coat.

"What did you follow me for?" he asked angrily.

Katie stood staring in silence at Rolf's pale face and terror-stricken countenance.

"Here, you had better take him home," said Augustus, hastily handing his prisoner over to her keeping. "Catch hold of his sleeve, and don't let him run away; he might as well get something to eat first thing. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Katie, pleased at observing the expression of relief on Rolf's face at this transfer from the brother's rough grasp to the sister's gentle touch.

"And," added Gus, with a sudden access of colour, "you needn't say a word of this to anyone."

"A word about what?"

"About anything; just hold your tongue."

"But everyone will ask me where I found him."

"Well, invent any answer you please, but don't implicate me."

"I must tell the truth," said Katie gravely.

"Do you know where Rolf was?" asked Gus vehemently.

"No."

"Well, *say* you don't, and there's no more about it."

Katie turned away with her willing charge, and went slowly towards the house. Augustus stood on the confines of the little wood, with folded arms, frowning darkly, as he watched them cross the field and enter the house. Then passing along a narrow lane on his right, he reached the high road to Oxondown, and returned home by the front avenue. No one was in the garden, or shrubbery, or on the lawn, so he went towards the low open window of the drawing-room, and stepped in. Here he found all the children gathered round his stepmother's sofa, talking eagerly to each other in low tones. Mrs. Stanton was gravely addressing Katie, who, blushing deeply, with quivering lips and downcast eyes, stood silent before her.

"You say that you know nothing of Rolf's hiding-place, Katie," their stepmother was saying as he came in, "and yet you seem to know a great deal more about it than you choose to tell."

Poor Katie! Two bright tears shone in her long, dark eyelashes, but she did not speak.

"I hope my little girl will not let the great enemy Untruth have any power over heart or lips, but that she will draw her invincible sword from its sheath, and wield it boldly ; will you dear ? Will you ask your great Captain to make you valiant for the truth, and tell simply and openly all you know about this poor little boy ?"

Still silence. Katie looked round helplessly, and caught the anxious, troubled eyes of Augustus, as he watched her from the window.

What a fierce struggle had been going on in his mind all this time ! How the great usurper Untruth had taken ascendancy in his heart ? and, oh, how hard, how bitter, were all his efforts to dislodge him ! With one upward mental glance, one half-breathed prayer, he buckled on his sword and thrust fiercely at the enemy ; then meeting his little sister's pleading, imploring glance, he cast out the enemy with one final effort, and came forward.

"Mamma," he said, kneeling on one knee by the sofa, "it is I who need to be valiant for the truth, not Katie. I asked her to say nothing for fear she would betray me. I daresay they have all told you how I wanted to make friends with Rolf last night, and when he persisted in being afraid of me, how very angry I was, and ran after him into the wood ?"

"Yes, Gus, I heard that."

"Well, mamma, I found him hiding in the corner of the old wood-shed. He was crouching down behind a broken barrel in a state of such abject terror that I hadn't the heart to hurt him ; but seeing the padlock hanging in the door, I thought it would be a good punishment for him to lock him up there for an hour or two, and then make friends with him before I let him out ; so I put on the padlock, and walked back with the key in my pocket. Then nurse came out with her tiresome scolding, and we went for a walk, and then came in to talk to you, and, only think, I quite forgot poor Rolf till Katie told me he had mysteriously disappeared, and I ran off at once and let him out."

"The servants gave him a very good dinner," said Katie consolingly.

Augustus glanced enquiringly at his stepmother, who looked very grave as she explained to him how very wrong it was to frighten anyone, and especially cruel and cowardly to terrify a little helpless fellow like Rolf. What must he not have endured throughout the long, dreary hours of darkness, when they were fast asleep in their comfortable beds; and what anxiety he had caused Mrs. Leonard and Jessie to endure, when hour after hour passed away and he came not. Augustus listened gravely and regretfully, and expressed his sorrow for it again and again.

"Oh, mamma," he cried at last, "if you only knew, if you could only see, how sorry I am!"

"I quite believe it, Gus," she answered; "so we shall talk no more of the victory Cruelty and Temper won over you, but rather of the defeat the great foe Untruth sustained at your hands a little while ago."

"It was a hard battle," said Gus, glancing with a deep sigh towards the window-sill, where it had been fought; "only that you seemed to blame little innocent Katie, mamma, I don't think I should ever have been victorious."

"Or rather, only that you sought the aid of the Prince of Peace, you would have been the loser in the sharp contest."

"I think I shall tell you all a story now, and we shall call it

Valiant for the Truth.

"Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth."—EPHESIANS vi. 14.

"What a coward Beatrice is! I did not think girls *could* be so foolish. She's the silliest little goose!' And Frederick Austin burst into a loud laugh.

"Why, what has she been doing?" asked his brother Ted.

"She was coming down the garden walk just now, smiling all to herself as serene as could be, when I bounced out at her with the watering-pot, and sprinkled her all over. You should

have seen her start and run, and then stop short, blushing to the roots of her hair, and begging and praying of me not to run after her. Was there ever such a little donkey ?’

“ ‘Never, I am sure,’ said Ted, laughing heartily. ‘I found her crying and sobbing in the barn the other day. She had gone out to feed her chickens, and old Carlo having snapped his chain, she heard him barking outside, and was weeping her eyes out, afraid to come back across the yard.’

“ ‘I say, Ted,’ exclaimed Frederick, as a new idea struck him, ‘suppose we were to dress up, and give her a good fright for once ; it would break her of all this nonsense, eh ?’

“ ‘She’d be in an awful way,’ replied Ted doubtfully ; ‘and if it should come to papa’s or mother’s ears, we should never hear the end of it.’

“ ‘Never fear, Ted ; she’d bear anything rather than peach. Let’s have a white figure pay his respects to her when she’s in bed.’

“ ‘Bother, no ; I hate ghosts !’

“ ‘Well, I’ll tell you what we could do ; make the little hideous black dwarf, that gradually and mysteriously develops herself into a giantess. That would be capital, and it will bear daylight too. She might meet it in the conservatory, when she comes in.’

“ ‘Ted thrust his hands into his pockets, kicked the gravel about, and demurred a little.

“ ‘You see,’ pursued Frederick, ‘it would not be so bad as a ghost in her bedroom, because she can run away when she sees it. But, I say, we must lock the hall door, or she’ll fly like a shot into the drawing-room, and let out the whole concern.’

“ ‘Nonsense ; I won’t have her shut out alone, shaking all over in the garden. If you choose to dress up, and make such an ass of yourself, I’ll stand at the hall door, and stop her as she rushes in.’

“ ‘But you will have to tell her the whole thing, and my fun will be spoilt.’

“ ‘Well, what of that? You may give the child a good start, if you like; but I won’t have slow torture afterwards. How are you going to manage it?’

“ ‘Oh, I’ll get the long mop, the cobweb brush, you know, and stick a jolly black face on it, with staring whites to the eyes, and a hat on top, and then mother’s long waterproof cloak will hide me, and be tied round the old lady’s neck; then, while she is gaping at it, I’ll raise the broom handle slowly above my head, till she is a most stupendous height; and won’t Beatrice cut, that’s all.

“ ‘I wouldn’t do it, if I were you,’ said Ted, slowly nodding his head.

“ ‘You’re not asked,’ retorted Frederick.

“ ‘It’s a horrid shame,’ remonstrated Ted.

“ ‘Bosh!’ returned Frederick, turning on his heel, and walking off towards the house.

“Ted said no more; he wandered among the garden paths, still kicking the little stones about, with a vexed, dissatisfied expression.

“And where was the destined little victim of this cruel project—little timid, sensitive Beatrice Austin? Why, down among the buttercups and daisies, hidden in the long grass of the uncut meadow. She had not heard a word of the wicked plot, yet there were two bright drops undried on her rosy cheeks—whether the effect of the watering-pot, or two bright tears, it would be difficult to say. Her little pinafore was spread out in the sun, on the top of the waving grass, to dry, lest nurse should ask awkward questions; and she was holding out the front of her little blue skirt with both hands to allow the warm summer wind to play on both sides of it. The great dark blotches were drying out fast, but still she waved it gently up and down, her eyes fixed on the soft white clouds that floated across the dazzling blue sky.

“Beatrice was thinking; wondering to herself why she was *such* a coward; why little girls were so very much sillier than



“ Poor Beatrice felt rooted to the spot, she could not turn or fly, but stood terror stricken ”

“ VALIANT FOR THE TRUTH.”

Page 293.



big boys ; why Frederick found such delight in terrifying her ; why Ted was so much more good-natured ; and many other questions equally hard to answer.

“ But the result of all these cogitations was that the golden head peeped up from its little nest. She put on the now crisp, tumbled pinafore, and down went the bright hair into the long flowery grass. This time little Beatrice was on her knees, with her head bent, her hands folded, her rosy lips moving softly as she prayed for true courage ; for though only six years old, she had already enlisted in Christ’s army, and though naturally timid and easily alarmed, had more than once shown herself a brave and faithful soldier of the cross. It was a very peaceful, happy little maiden that a few minutes afterwards pushed through the deep grass, opened the garden wicket, and crossed the croquet-ground in the direction of the conservatory.

“ But, oh, what was that dreadful black creature that moved stealthily behind the bright rows of geraniums and heliotrope as she entered ? Beatrice stopped in surprise and fear just as a black face, with thick red lips and glaring whites to the bead-like eyes, peeped out from the leaves of a large azalia, and then advanced with mincing step to meet her. Poor Beatrice felt rooted to the spot. She could not turn or fly, but stood terror-stricken. But, oh, horror ! the dark figure slowly elongated its throat, and grew with awful rapidity to a stupendous height. The narrow shoulders sloped more horribly every moment as the round black face mounted upwards, high above the oleanders and camellias, till it almost touched the vine-leaves overhead. Every trace of colour had fled from the little girl’s lips and cheeks. She gave one sharp cry, and stumbling over a beautiful stephanotis covered with blossom, child and plant fell heavily to the ground.

“ In an instant Ted had rushed in, and was raising her in his arms, soothing her childish terror with his kind, hearty voice ; and Frederick, full of remorse, was tearing off his disguise, and putting it hastily out of sight.

“ ‘Why it was only me, you silly little goose.’

“ ‘Shut up!’ retorted his brother sharply; ‘don’t you see you have terrified the child? ’twas carrying a joke a deal too far. Never fear, Trissy, he shan’t do it again; ’twas a shame.’

“ But little Beatrice lay motionless, and it was some minutes before her smiling blue eyes opened, and shone up into Ted’s good-natured face through the glistening tears like a rainbow.

“ ‘Here, Freddie, fork out those things from behind there, and show her what your black witch was composed of.’

“ Frederick drew out the long broom, the black mask, and his mother’s waterproof cloak sheepishly enough, and displayed them one by one to Beatrice’s wistful, wondering gaze.

“ ‘Now are you not silly to be afraid of such nonsense?’ he said, laughing awkwardly.

“ ‘She’s wiser than you,’ retorted Ted. ‘Bless me, it is papa’s prize stephanotis you have capsized in your tumble!’

“ ‘Oh, I hope not!’ she exclaimed, picking the crushed blossoms out of the scattered earth and pieces of broken flower-pot. ‘Oh, is it really, Freddie?’

“ ‘Yes, indeed,’ said Frederick, ruefully shaking his head. ‘Won’t papa be in a way when he finds it out!’ He will be sure to think it is that stupid fellow Ralph that did it; he is always in mischief. Let’s gather it all up, and no one will be a bit the wiser; for a while at least.’

“ ‘I must tell papa to-night, because I did it,’ said Beatrice steadily, as she helped to gather the broken pieces into an empty flower-pot standing by.

“ ‘You shall do no such thing.’

“ ‘I must, Freddie.’

“ ‘What do you mean?’ he cried angrily; ‘you are not going to turn tell-tale, are you?’

“ ‘No; I upset it my own self; I will tell him so when he comes in.’

“ ‘And won’t papa ask you how it happened, you unmitigated little muff? and then I’ll come in for a tremendous rowing.’

“‘Well, you deserve it,’ observed Ted under his breath.

“‘I need only say I fell over it,’ answered the little soldier quietly; ‘may be papa won’t ask more.’

“‘It will be sure to come out somehow.’

“‘I wonder you did it, if you are so ashamed of it,’ remarked Ted.

“‘Very well,’ said Frederick, crimsoning with anger, “as sure as you tell of me, Beatrice, I’ll give you an awful fright, a stunning one, mind you; this was nothing to what it will be;’ and gathering up his disguise he marched away with all the dignity he could muster.

“‘Never fear, Trissy,’ said Ted kindly—for the round check had grown pale again at this dreadful threat. He won’t do it again; he was as sorry as I was when you fell, I saw it in his face. Now scamper off to tea, or nurse will come out here to find you.’

“‘Trissy,’ exclaimed Frederick, stopping his little sister in the passage near the nursery a few minutes afterwards, “you don’t know what awful trouble you’ll get yourself into if you tell papa about the broken stephanotis. It is only just and fair to warn you of it beforehand.’

“‘I can’t help it,’ said Beatrice with a deep sigh.

“‘If you once saw papa properly angry, you would think twice before you dared to rouse him, I can tell you.’

“‘I *have* seen papa angry, said the child with starting tears.

“‘Ay, vexed a little with you perhaps, and saying, “You naughty little girl, don’t do so again.” But I wish you had seen him the day I killed Rover.’

“‘But you were cruel, Freddie, and broke his leg with stones.’

“‘Well, what of that? Why this broken flower is just the very thing to send him into a towering rage. He said the other day there was not another plant in the country to be compared to it, and it was to have gone up for the prize next Tuesday.’

“Two glistening tears escaped from the long eyelashes, and slowly rolled down Beatrice’s cheeks.

“ ‘Well, won’t you be a good-natured little body now, and promise not to tell?’

“The child raised her steadfast, glistening eyes full to his face, and paused for a moment to draw the strong girdle of truth closer round her.

“ ‘I *must*,’ she said softly, and without waiting for another word went on to the nursery.

“ ‘You will be sorry to hear, Mary, our prize stephanotis is broken to pieces. That awkward boy was watering the plants just now, and probably overturned it.’

“It was papa that spoke. He threw himself on the sofa by mother’s side, and she looked up from her work with a face of grave concern.

“ ‘He may not have done it,’ she said.

“ ‘Of course he denies it; but I have little doubt he did it, tiresome, clumsy fellow. This is the third or fourth time he has done me mischief. I feel strongly inclined to dismiss him.’

“ ‘Perhaps it was Carlo.’

“ ‘No; he has been chained up all day.’

“ ‘Or one of the children?’

“She glanced at the two boys as she spoke, for Beatrice had not come down from the nursery. Frederick seemed deeply interested in a big book. Ted’s whistle ceased in the window; his father turned to him.

“ ‘You had nothing to say to this disaster, Ted?’

“ ‘No, papa.’

“ ‘Frederick?’

“ ‘No, papa.’ Frederick only glanced up to say the words; the book seemed to be so interesting, he was engrossed in it the next instant. But if papa had got up to look over his shoulder, he would have discovered that it was the dictionary turned upside down. There was an uncomfortable silence. Ted felt uneasy for his brother; but Frederick felt nothing but a dread of Beatrice’s entrance.

“ ‘I have no doubt it was Ralph,’ pursued their father. ‘I shall forbid him to enter the conservatory.’

“ ‘I have always known him to speak the truth,’ said his wife, almost unconsciously glancing towards Frederick. Perhaps there had been something in the tone of his answer that had not sounded quite satisfactory.

“ ‘It was *Beatrice* who did it,’ repeated Frederick to himself for the hundredth time.

“ ‘Your unkind trick was the whole cause of the accident,’ said something within that would not be silenced.

“ Ted meanwhile looked out on the cloudless blue sky, his lips gathered up to utter a low, tuneless whistle. He felt frightened for poor *Beatrice*, and scarcely knew whether he most longed for or dreaded the sound of the little step in the hall.

“ Just overhead, in the nursery, another pair of blue eyes were fixed on the quiet evening sky, another pair of rosy lips were moving softly, another frightened heart was throbbing loudly; a poor, timid little soldier, weak in herself, but strong in her Helper, was begging of the great Captain to clothe her in His holy armour, and to clasp His broad, beautiful girdle of truth more firmly round her.

“ It was a very grave, steadfast little face that came back to nurse to have the bright auburn hair made smooth, the crimson sash put straight; and then a little footstep was heard on the staircase, both little feet coming down on each step before another was attempted.

“ There was a pitter-patter across the paved hall, the handle of the drawing-room door was turned with two tiny hands, and *Beatrice* came in.

“ ‘Papa,’ she said, going at once towards him; ‘I am so sorry, dear papa, but I knocked over your beautiful white flower in the conservatory.’

“ ‘You?’ exclaimed papa in surprise, taking both the little trembling hands in his; ‘I told you not to touch the plants, *Beatrice*, did I not?’

“Beatrice hung her head, and Frederick nervously turned over several leaves, and crossed one leg over the other.

“‘Has my little girl disobeyed papa?’

“‘I was coming in from the garden,’ hesitated Beatrice, blushing deeply; ‘I am so sorry, papa, I tumbled quite over it.’

“‘At play with Freddie and Ted?’

“Beatrice glanced doubtfully at her brothers, and her father continued.

“‘I must forbid that for the future, Beatrice; play on the lawn, in the garden, where you please, but not there.’

“‘Yes, papa.’

“He stooped to kiss the quivering lips, and took her on his knee.

“‘My brave little soldier,’ he said, smiling kindly; ‘it makes papa happy to find his little girl is not afraid to tell him the whole truth. Do you hear, boys, both of you, I can’t have games in the conservatory. Which of you was playing with her?’

“‘I came in after she fell,’ said Ted.

“‘Were you with her, Frederick?’

“‘Yes, papa.’

“‘Please, sir,’ interposed a servant at the door, ‘the gardener wants to speak to you.’

“Beatrice slipped down from her father’s knee; but he did not want to leave his little girl.

“‘Tell him to come in,’ he said, lifting her back again.

“‘Beg yer pardon, sir,’ broke in the gardener’s hoarse voice; ‘but Ralph’s been telling me of the loss of the stephanotis, and I think one of the young gentlemen had more to do with it than any one; for I was passing round there myself this evening, and saw one of ’em dressing up in a mask, and I don’t know what all, hiding behind the plants, and I made pretty sure some mischief would follow. I met little missey on the lawn, going up there too.’

“‘Yes, Green, I know how it happened. I have found out that Ralph was not in any way to blame.’

"Then, as the man touched his forehead, and turned away somewhat disappointed 'those two troublesome young gents didn't get into trouble about it,' their father turned to them, and enquired gravely,

"Which of you was it?"

"There was a dead silence.

"It wasn't I,' said Ted at length in a low tone.

"You, Frederick?"

"Yes, papa.'

"Had you anything to do with Beatrice's fall?"

"There was no use in disguising the truth further. Frederick saw by his father's stern manner he had guessed it all.

"Trissy is such a little goose,' he muttered.

"Look up, sir,' exclaimed his father angrily, 'and answer my question.'

"Such an arrant coward,' growled Frederick in an indistinct mumble.

"Coward!' echoed his father indignantly; 'who is the coward? Go to my study, sir, and answer that question to your own conscience!'

"He put little Beatrice gently into his own place on the sofa, and followed Frederick out of the room. There was a breathless silence as the door closed. Beatrice burst into a flood of tears, and it needed her mother's tender caresses and consoling words to comfort her. It seemed a long time before papa came back, looking very grave; and Frederick appeared no more that evening.

"Papa,' whispered Beatrice in his ear, when she kissed him, and wished him 'good-night,' 'won't you please forgive Freddie?"

"I have forgiven him, Trissy; he seems really sorry. Trot off to nurse now, she is waiting to put that little tired head to rest.'

"Beatrice tripped away, and once more climbed the staircase. As she passed along Frederick's door opened a little.

"Trissy," whispered a low, trembling voice, 'stop a bit; come

here.' Beatrice came instantly, her sweet face full of love and sympathy. He caught her in his strong arms, and kissed her again and again.

"‘I’m awfully sorry ; good-night, Trissy.’

"‘Good-night,’ responded the child, warmly returning his embrace.

"‘You are a little brick,’ said Frederick, from the depth of his repentant heart ; ‘a stunning little darling ! Never fear, I shan’t frighten you again, my own brave little Trissy !’

"And again he covered the rosy lips and cheeks with kisses, and let her go.

"It was with the pink flush of pleasure still on them that she knelt again by her little cot, and gave humble and hearty thanks to the Saviour, whose bright armour and ready help had enabled such a little foolish, timid heart to be more than conqueror in the battle."





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LITTLE PEACEMAKER.

What Have I to Do with Him?

THE last bright beams of the setting sun shone slanting across the kitchen garden at Stanton Villa, where, close behind the smoothly-clipped yew hedge, stood little Katie Stanton and Jessie Leonard face to face.

"I doan't loike that young gent," Jessie was saying, with her finger in her mouth and an angry gleam in her eyes; "he be a bad 'un."

"Oh, no," pleaded Katie earnestly; "he wants to be kind to Rolf."

"He doan't show it then," said Jessie moodily.

"Rolf is so afraid of him."

"Nay wonder," interposed Jessie.

"But if you explained—Rolf understands your signs—if you would only tell him he need not fear."

"I telt him the big young gent was a right wicked 'un, and warned Rolf never to go next or nigh him!" said Jessie with emphasis.

"That was very wrong," said the little peacemaker gravely; for you know quite well, Jessie, he is not at all wicked, and you are not the least afraid of him yourself."

"I have a tongue and ears," said Jessie, touching each member significantly, "and can look to myself. Rolf can't; so the young gent plagues him sorely."

"He wanted to be kind to Rolf; but your brother was so much afraid it made him angry. If you liked to be a really good girl, Jessie, you would make Rolf know all this, and he would never be afraid again."

"Where's the use of making peace between 'em?" asked Jessie. "The lady inside the house yonder said as we was always to be fighting, and never at rest."

"Mamma did not say 'with each other.' You understood what she meant quite well, Jessie."

"Ay, she meant with our heart and will, and all that's inside of us; and mighty hard fellows they be to deal with."

"We are to fight against all that is wrong," said Katie simply; "and when a naughty voice within us says, 'It's no business of mine to make peace,' we must remember our Prince is the Prince of peace, and ask Him to help us to do what is right."

"And does He want me to make peace between the young gent and Rolf?"

"Yes," replied Katie reverently; "He says, 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.'"

"Do He say that in the Bible what the lady reads to me?"

"Yes; He said it Himself."

"Well, I'll see to it," said Jessie soberly. "When Rolf comes home to-night I shall just 'splain it all to him."

She turned and went away, and little Katie skipped off to the house with a light heart. There were loud voices in the drawing-room as she entered.

"I declare I shall have nothing more to do with him," Augustus was saying, as he walked angrily up and down the room. "To think that I should stay by him for nearly half an hour, making every kind of advance I could think of, and after all he rushed off, looking back to see if I were in pursuit of him! It is perfectly unendurable."

"It will require a great deal of patience and perseverance to

make friends now," said Mrs. Stanton quietly. "You have never really experienced what fear is, Gus. That is why you make so little allowance for its effects. Where have you been all this time, Katie dear?"

"In the garden, mamma, talking to Jessie."

"About Gus and Rolf?"

"Yes," said the child, with a bright blush, as her stepmother drew her near, and kissed her.

"You need not have troubled yourself to meddle in the matter," said Augustus crossly; "for I shall have nothing more to say to him again—never!"

"Oh, Gus ——"

"It is a fact," he vociferated. "I shall never go near him again. What is he to me, or I to him?"

"A great deal," said Mrs. Stanton gravely. "I trust you are two fellow-soldiers in the great army, fighting side by side."

"I did not know that Rolf was a soldier of the cross," said Augustus, more quietly.

"I believe he is," said Mrs. Stanton, "from what Jessie has told me. Their father was a very good man, and taught Rolf a great deal. Jessie spent a great part of her childhood with an aunt near Birmingham, and so had not the same advantages."

"Mamma, will you tell us a story?" said Augustus. "Our next letter is W."

"Very well; then the title of my little tale shall be,

What Have I to do with Him?

"Am I my brother's keeper?"—GENESIS iv. 9.

"Wilfred Selby was strolling down the long avenue of his beautiful home, arm-in-arm with Bertram Chester, his school-fellow and great chum; and as they approached the front entrance to the park, both stopped suddenly in the midst of an animated conversation they had been carrying on, and listened attentively.

“‘There was certainly a cry,’ said Wilfred, ‘as if some one had been hurt ; let us go and see.’”

“They hastened on, opened the side gate, and emerged on the high road.

“Several boys were gathered in a circle some way off, and renewed cries of fear and distress came from their midst.

“The two friends hurried on in silence, and came up with the group in a minute or two. Wilfred Selby, without a moment’s pause, pushed his way to the centre ; he returned to his friend directly.

“‘They are licking some unlucky little fellow,’ he said, with a face of disgust.

“‘Oh, is that all?’ returned Bertram with a laugh.

“‘I don’t half like it,’ said Wilfred, as his friend drew his arm within his own, and led him away.

“‘I daresay the little chap deserves it richly,’ said his friend coolly.

“‘Perhaps so ; but he had such a ponderous heavy fellow over him,’ he added, flushing slightly. ‘There, he is at it again!’ as more cries rent the quiet summer air.

“‘Oh, he will survive it ! I never knew a boy who couldn’t bear a thrashing. Come —— No, Wilfred, surely you are not going back ! Don’t be so absurdly soft-hearted ; it is no business of yours ; you have nothing on earth to do with him.’

“But Wilfred withdrew his arm, and turned back, without heeding his friend’s remonstrances ; for other words that he had read that morning were still fresh in his memory. ‘Likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.’

“Once more he pushed boldly into the very middle of the circle, raised the bruised and weeping child, and confronted his tormentor.

“‘You coward !’ he exclaimed, his cheek growing pale with righteous wrath, ‘what right have you to ill-use a little fellow like this?’

“‘He was cheeky,” interposed a bystander, as the big sheepish-looking youth slunk back a few steps, cowering visibly as he met the young squire’s flashing eyes.

“‘You are a great bully to strike such a child as this. Don’t ever dare to do so again. I shan’t let you off so easily next time, I can tell you. Indeed, you are all just as bad,’ he added, turning suddenly round upon the crowd, ‘every one of you. How could you all stand by and see him do it without interfering? it is a disgrace to the whole village.’

“With blushing cheeks and sullen looks they all turned away, and went down the road preceded by the big boy.

“Wilfred waited till they were all out of sight, then turned to the little woe-begone creature by his side.

“‘What is your name?’ he asked kindly.

“The child struck his heel deeply into the mud, contemplated the impression it had made with deep solemnity, but made no reply.

“‘What did you do to make that fellow treat you so?’ No answer.

“‘How did you vex him; come, tell me?’

“The child put his finger in his mouth, and still made no response.

“‘Well, don’t do it again, if it was anything wrong,’ said Wilfred, patting the little dusty shoulder; ‘and now run home, like a good little boy. You need not be afraid; they won’t dare to hurt you again.’

“The little fellow went off obediently, and Wilfred went back with a half-suppressed sigh, and joined his friend once more on the avenue.

“‘Well,’ said Bertram, laughing, ‘I hope he was grateful for your interference.’

“‘I did not do it to gain his gratitude,’ replied young Selby briefly.

“‘No, of course not; it was a much grander motive,’ said Bertram mockingly. ‘I’d see a fellow pretty nearly killed before I would bother myself about him.’

“ ‘You may *say* so now,’ said Wilfred, recovering his temper with an effort; ‘but when it came to the point there would be nothing you would not do to help to save him.’

“ ‘A soft answer turneth away wrath.’

“ Bertram slid his arm once more within his friend’s, laughed gaily, and changed the conversation.

“ About a week afterwards Wilfred Selby brought a message from his father to one of his tenants, a rich farmer, who lived about two miles from the park; and having paid a long visit, he mounted his fine black horse, and proceeded leisurely by the orchard, whistling cheerily, and singing snatches of song from time to time. He suddenly drew in his rein, as he perceived something moving in one of the farmer’s well-covered fruit trees. Supposing it to be a fowl or a squirrel that had hidden itself in the thick branches, Wilfred uttered a loud and prolonged sound, like ‘sh—sh—sh—sh.’

“ The black object gave a violent start, and a pair of rosy cheeks and terrified eyes peeped out from among the foliage. In a moment he recognised the little boy he had rescued a few days before.

“ He was about to ride on when the same parable recurred to his memory; he drew in the rein of his impatient steed, and cried out, ‘I say, what brought you up there?’

“ There was no answer.

“ ‘Why don’t you come down?’

“ ‘A faint, melancholy little voice lisped, ‘Can’t.’

“ ‘Is it *can’t* or *won’t*?’ enquired Wilfred, somewhat impatiently.

“ The gréat black eyes stared at him, but no one word came from the branches.

“ ‘I think you had better get down at once,’ pursued Wilfred, patting the glossy neck of his restive steed, or perhaps I shall dismount and take you.’

“ The black eyes gleamed with terror, and something like a sob came from the tree; then the boughs moved and swayed—

crunch, crunch—bang! Down he came to the ground with a crash!

Wilfred could scarcely help laughing at the involuntary promptness of his obedience; but the boy did not look at all inclined to be mirthful; he seemed rather to consider it a serious business, and rubbed his knees and elbows with a very doleful face, as he turned his head aside to wipe away a few tears.

“Wilfred Selby dismounted, and passing his arm through the reins, led his horse to the foot of the tree.

“‘Hurt, are you?’ he asked, in a pleasant, winning manner that invited confidence. But it seemed as if nothing would extract a word from the obstinate little fellow; he gave a kind of grunt, and rubbed his tears away with the knuckles of both hands.

“‘I am afraid you climbed that tree to steal plums,’ said Wilfred, despairing of carrying on the conversation by interrogatives that elicited nothing. ‘I am sure you know that it is a naughty and bad way to act, and little boys who do such things deserve to be punished; but I daresay you are sorry now, and don’t mean to do so again.’ He paused, for, after all, what was this ragged little urchin to him? But being a true soldier of the cross, he gave one mental glance upward, and continued with some apparent effort, ‘The great God who lives above in heaven has said we should not steal, and He will be very angry with us if we disobey His holy commandments, and do things that He has told us not to do. I daresay some one has told you about Him; how He loves little children, and died on the cross to make them His own, and bring them to a bright and beautiful place when they die.’

“The stolid face softened a little, and Wilfred ventured to ask gently, ‘Has any one ever told you about Him?’

“The brown, freckled forehead wrinkled up, and a little broken voice said, ‘Mother.’

“‘What is your name?’ asked Wilfred, eager to follow up his advantage.

“ ‘Tony Babbage.’

“ ‘And where do you live?’

“ ‘Far way—Holman’s Cross—beyond it.’

“ ‘Ah, I thought you were not one of the villagers! Will you try to be a good boy, and now go straight home to your mother?’

“ ‘I ain’t got none no more,’ muttered Tony; and the little hard knuckles were once more thrust into his eyes.

“ Wilfred’s face was full of sympathy.

“ ‘Poor little fellow ——’

“ ‘Hallo, Selby!’ called a gay voice.

“ Wilfred looked up quickly, and encountered the wondering, mocking gaze of his friend Bertram Chester and his sister.

“ ‘You seem to have a marvellous predilection for little arabs,’ laughed Bertram as he rode up. ‘Come with us; won’t you? We are going for a canter over Heathstone Moor.’

“ Wilfred turned from the child, and remounted.

“ ‘Here, little Tony,’ he said, leaning over towards the boy, who was walking backwards into the hedge, in his extreme terror at the black horse’s frisky manifestations of delight at the prospect of a sharp canter, ‘you know where I live, don’t you?’

“ Tony nodded wisely from his bower in the hedge.

“ ‘Well, if you should want anything—any friend—come there to me, won’t you?’

“ But Tony’s shy advances had been frozen again by the presence of two strangers. He only stared blankly at him, and said nothing; and half vexed, half relieved by the interruption, Wilfred rode away with his friends.

“ It often afterwards seemed strange to him that in all his wanderings, on horseback or on foot, he never met the little fellow again. He even once directed his steps as far as Holman’s Cross, a bleak, dreary spot on the top of the moor, where four rutty ill-kept roads met; but not a human habitation was in sight, and he met no one of whom he might make enquiries.

So by-and-by he returned to college with his friend, and almost forgot the circumstance.

"Years passed on; and one misty November evening two gentlemen stood on the pier at Portsmouth engaged in earnest conversation. A sailor leaned against a buttress close by, watching them with an interest far too keen to be that of an ordinary stranger. A fine vessel bound for some distant port lay alongside, while it was being laden with cargo and passengers. The young men watched the busy scene, with looks of lazy amusement, while they carried on their conversation on other topics.

"Suddenly another gentleman joined them, wrapped in a long Ulster and huge scarlet comforter, carrying a black bag, with the air of bustle and eagerness of one on the verge of a long journey.

"'Well, good-bye, Selby; farewell, Chester. She starts in two minutes.'

"'Good-bye; God bless you,' said the two young men, while both shook hands with him warmly, lingeringly, and Bertram Chester went with the new-comer to the bridge. Wilfred Selby advanced to the edge of the jetty, and looked compassionately on a tender farewell taking place on deck between a fair-haired youth and a tearful old woman, evidently his mother.

"The sailor, whose absorbed interest in the two gentlemen had never wavered, now took a step forward, then stopped short, looking sheepish and abashed, and returned to his former post of observation.

"The great vessel was getting under weigh; the indescribable confusion increased every moment. The captain mounted the bridge of the steamer, and shouted some deafening orders; ropes were loosed, and the great paddles turned once or twice.

"Wilfred Selby watched the gleaming white surf rise and spread over the quiet green waters beneath the stonework, when there was a loud cry behind him of, 'B'yer leave, sir—look out—the rope!' A dozen warning voices were raised on

the deck below him. He raised his head, looked round in surprise, and was instantly swept by the huge coil of rope into the boiling surge beneath.

“With the speed of lightning the young sailor in the background had sprung in after him; and he no sooner rose, struggling to the surface, than he was clutched by a strong hand, and a deep voice spoke some words of warning and direction in his ear. With great presence of mind, and the perfect calmness of a lifetime spent in God’s service, he lifted his heart in that awful moment to God his Saviour, and avoiding grasping or dragging the hand stretched out to him, obeyed the mandates of his deliverer as to where he was to hold by him, and how to rest on the water. The strong, stalwart young sailor swam forward steadily. A few of his powerful strokes brought them to a little boat moored near the spot; and again simply doing as he was desired, Wilfred found himself lying safe, but exhausted, in the stern, while the young mariner, looking cool and unconcerned, as though saving a man’s life were an easy and every-day occurrence, cut her from her anchorage, took out the sculls, and rowed in to the jetty. There Wilfred Selby was met by his friend, and brought quickly to the hotel, where all that was possible was done for him, and in a few hours afterwards he felt no further ill effects from his sudden immersion.

“Every enquiry had been made for the young sailor who, without a moment’s hesitation, had risked his own life to save him; but all in vain. He had disappeared, no one knew whither.

“It was not till one bright moonlight evening, about a fortnight after the accident, that Wilfred was seated at the pier-head, watching the moonbeams dancing and sparkling on the sea, when, at the sound of a step beside him, he looked up, and recognised the dark-bearded lips and intensely black eyes of the man he had been making every effort to find.

“He was evidently unconscious of the presence of another,

and stood with folded arms watching a distant white speck on the horizon.

“Wilfred rose, and approaching him, offered frankly and sincerely his thanks for his noble conduct. The sailor neither spoke nor moved. And the young man, supposing him to be a foreigner, proceeded to repeat the sentence in French.

“‘Twasn’t no more than you done for me,’ returned a deep gruff and essentially English voice.

“Wilfred stopped short in astonishment. The sailor turned round and faced him without another word. Those stolid features and lustrous black eyes could belong only to one person he had ever met before, and with a start of surprise young Selby recognized Tony Babbage.

“With an exclamation of pleasure he seized the hard brown, almost unwilling hand of his former *protégé*, and expressed his pleasure at the *rencontre*. Tony drew his horny knuckles across his eyes, with the gesture Wilfred so well remembered, and grunted something inaudible.

“‘Did you recognize me at once?’ asked Wilfred.

“‘Ay, the instant I sot eyes on yer.’

“I am indebted to your courage and kindness for my life ; I wish I could do something for you.’

“‘You’ve done more’n all for me ; you was the saving of me body and soul. God in heaven, who led me to find a Saviour, will bless and reward you for it.’

“This was a very long sentence for Tony Babbage. He turned hastily away, and was out of sight in a moment.”





CHAPTER XXIV.

SAD TIDINGS.

Bielding yet Bearing.

“ H, Gus, is it not terrible?” exclaimed Ada, looking up into her brother’s tear-stained face, as he entered the breakfast-room the following morning, her own eyes swollen with weeping, and hot tears, still undried, resting upon her pale cheeks.

“I have been speaking to nurse,” he answered, sighing wearily. “She says there is no hope whatever now; she guessed it from the first when there was no letter.”

“But mamma kept up hoping for so long; she seemed to think there were many ways of accounting for his silence.”

“Yes; but that is all over now; the newspaper account is only too plain.”

“Did you see it?”

“Yes; there is a description of the skirmish, and at the end a list of the killed and wounded. Three killed; I forget the first, the second is Colonel Stanton.”

“Papa is captain, at least he was; could there be some mistake?”

“No, none whatever; there was no one else of his name in the regiment.”

“Dear papa! Oh, Gus, I wish we had been more really frightened about not hearing from him, this news would not then have been such a terrible shock.”

"I don't know that. It does not fall less heavily upon mamma now, though she was very anxious. Nurse is quite frightened about her."

"Why, is she worse?"

"No; in one way she seems almost better. She is no longer lying on the sofa. Nurse left the paper and her letter (I believe it is from her brother, to say he knows nothing of papa) at her door quite early this morning, and went down to her breakfast, when Grimes told her the bad news—he had seen it written up in the village—so then nurse came round, as you know, and told us all, that mamma should not have to do it; and afterwards hearing no movement in mamma's room, she got quite frightened, and knocked at the door. Mamma was preparing to come down to breakfast, looking dreadfully ill and pale, but quite calm. I thought that was a good thing, but nurse said it would be far better for her if she could shed tears as we did."

"Poor mamma," said Ada, beginning to weep again; "it is terrible for her. Just think, Gus, what a bright, beautiful young bride she looked the night dear papa brought her home; and he asked us to be good to her. Oh, I wish we had never thought of fighting that wicked battle against her! How gentle and patient she has been with us!"

"Let's poke up the fire," said Augustus, "and make the room look as nice as we can for her. She will be here directly. Come in, Tom, Katie, and Alf," he added, as three melancholy, tearful young faces appeared at the door.

A few minutes afterwards Mrs. Stanton came in, looking so pale, wan, and sad. They all felt that nurse was right in dreading her unnatural calmness more than their violent grief.

She kissed them all silently, and pouring out tea, went round the table, helping them to every thing they wanted, and apparently forgetting that she needed any thing herself.

There was an utter stillness in the depth of her great sorrow that prevented the children from speaking a word as they ate

and drank, chiefly to please her, and not to add to her grief by anxiety about them.

When they had finished she went away silently, noiselessly, as she had come, and Tom instantly burst into a noisy fit of crying.

"Hush! hush!" whispered little Katie, wiping away his fast-falling tears with her handkerchief. "Don't Tom, don't, if you can help it; for it will only make her more sorry."

Poor Tom smothered his sobs as best he could. "Must we go to school?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" said Gus re-assuringly; "I am sure not——" He stopped short, for Mrs. Stanton was among them again.

"Do not cry so, Tom dear," she said softly, as she drew him towards her. "Oh, no," she added in the same low, sweet tone to Augustus, "we shall not think of going to school to-day."

"What shall we do then, mamma?"

"Stay with me," she answered with a smile more sad than tears. "My only brother is far away, and you dear children are all I have on earth now; you are papa's last most precious gift to me."

They all gathered round her, and she spoke to them in the same low, quiet voice about their father; his goodness, uprightness, and courage; his tenderness, forbearance, and love; his dauntless courage in the Queen's army, and his steadfast, consistent bearing in the army of the great King.

Then, as they were disturbed by the entrance of the servant coming to remove the breakfast-things, they persuaded her to take a cup of tea, and begged her to come into the garden, and sit under the horse-chestnut tree.

As they passed through the hall her eyes fell on the crimson cloth, bearing the motto they had prepared to welcome their father home. This was one drop too much; with a burst of uncontrollable weeping, she ran upstairs to her room.

It was late in the day before they saw her again. They were all gathered silently under the horse-chestnut tree when she

came amongst them, her pale face bearing evident traces of the anguish she had passed through.

Each young face brightened when she appeared, but not one of them ventured to speak.

"I am afraid I have left you too long sad and lonely," she said, seating herself in the midst of them; "so I have come out to read you a story."

"Will it not be very trying to you, mamma?"

"No, dearest; I am happier when I feel I am doing the work he left me to do; the pleasant task of taking care of the little ones he loved so well. Y is our next letter; I shall call my little tale

*Y*ielding, yet *Y*earning.

"Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; and as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."—1 SAMUEL i. 28.

"My name is Alice Lindsay; I was seventeen last April. My father died when I was scarcely a year old; and ever since, mamma, Harold, and I have lived together in a pretty little villa by the sea.

"My first great sorrow was Harold being sent to school when he was about eleven years of age, and I only five. I shall never forget how I cried, and how utterly lonely I felt, when the partner of my childish joys and sorrows was gone; and no extra play-things, new dolls, or little friends coming to pass the day with me, could at all compensate for his loss. He was everything to me; and during the next ten years of my life the course of time was only marked to me by the delight of his arrival from school for the holidays, and my grief at his departure when the vacation was over.

"Dearly as I love him, I do not think I care for him at all more than he cares for me; though I remember one day, long ago, he made me quite unhappy by drawing a picture of his heart, and telling me the two bumps on the top were filled with affection for mamma, and the point was reserved for me. He

did not tell me to whom he had given the great centre of it; but when I asked him, he had a grave, far-off look in his eyes as he glanced at a Bible that lay near, but said not a word, and I knew immediately whom he meant.

“I did not like to have only the point for a long time, but I find it holds an overflowing measure of love, and indeed it must be a very large one to have even the point so wide.

“I sometimes half envy him having so much of it fixed far above the earth; not that it takes any of it from us below, for it gives his great affection for us a warmer and more unselfish glow; but it makes me long to give more than the little cold corner I bestow on those solemn things, when I see plainly that it is because he has the great centre of his affections fixed above that sheds such bright beams of love and kindness around him, and makes him so noble, so generous to others, so ready to overlook their failings, and encourage their better qualities. He told me on his thirteenth birthday that he had enlisted as a Christian soldier in the great army of the redeemed; and certainly the reflection of his beautiful armour shines so clear, no one could be in his society for half-an-hour without perceiving it. I know too that mamma enlisted, long, long ago, before I was born; she is so gentle and earnest, one can see that all her hopes and desires are fixed there, though she is so quiet and reserved.

“But for myself, what can I say that I am?—sometimes so brave and hopeful, sometimes so cast down and despairing. There are times when I think no one has such besetting sins to weigh them down, or so hard a fight to conquer them.

“*Fighting* sounds strong and courageous; but oh, to strive against my own very self, my own foolish wishes and naughtiness, is very, very hard! Harold finds it so too, though he is so much further on the pilgrimage than I; he told me so one day. But then he has not the least trust in himself, but flees to Christ at once in prayer, and it is this that gives him such power to resist, and makes him so sure of victory.



"A great, great grief has fallen upon me this evening. I scarcely know how to bear it. Having written so far, I ran downstairs; for I heard Harold's knock, and opened the door for him. I welcomed him joyously, and he was even more tender and loving to me than ever.

"But after our six o'clock dinner, when we came into the drawing-room—for Harold always comes in at once with us when we are alone—he began to look rather grave, and in a round-about way told us that it had always been his great wish from boyhood to become a missionary, and to-day he had a request from a devoted labourer of Christ's in a distant land to accompany him thither, and aid him in his good work.

"His eyes were fixed on mamma's face all the time he was speaking; but when he finished I actually screamed with horror, and turned his attention for a moment on me.

"'Oh, you shan't go!' I vociferated over and over again. 'There is plenty, plenty of work to be done in England; and now that you are a clergyman, Harold, there is no limit to the good you might do.'

"'There is a great deal to be done here,' he answered gently, 'but there are many workers, and many opportunities and means of grace for the people; but think for a moment, Alice, the multitudes ——'

"'But not *you*!' I interrupted. 'Why should it be *you*, Harold? You are so valuable—so loved. What should we do without you?'

"'In some way I think I am fitted for the duties it would entail,' said Harold, glancing appealingly to mamma. 'I am young, and very strong, and my whole desire is ——'

"Again I would not let him finish.

"'The climate of those dreadful places!' I cried, striving hard against the tears that welled into my eyes, and choked my voice. 'Oh, Harold, it is wrong to throw away your life!'

"'It is not an unhealthy climate,' he replied, with another

questioning glance at mamma. 'Mr. Nesbit has not had a day's illness, and the need is so great, the work so extensive ——'

"My tears would be restrained no longer. I hid my face in the sofa-cushion, and sobbed violently.

"A strong arm was thrown caressingly round me ; my drooping head was raised, and pillowed on his shoulder ; while those low endearing tones I loved so well whispered sweet words of comfort. My tears ceased to flow. I sat up with the dull, leaden feeling of despair in my heart, when Harold's next words made hope spring up again.

"'Mother,' he said, gazing wistfully at her sad, downcast face (she had not uttered a word all this time) ; 'mother, if it were your wish I should relinquish this idea, I am willing to yield it for your sake.'

"I clasped my hands tightly together, and looked unutterable things at mamma. She raised her pale, quiet face.

"'My son,' she said with quivering lips, 'when you were an infant I brought you to the Saviour's feet, and gave you to Him. He has graciously taken you to be His child ; and shall I hesitate to yield you to His service now, though my whole heart yearns to retain you?'

"Harold had grasped both my hands to keep me still while she spoke. He now disengaged them from his firm clasp, and crossing the room, knelt on one knee beside mamma's chair. She kissed him two or three times, and they spoke together in low, soft tones. I did not hear a word they said, though I believe it was perfectly audible ; for all my senses were absorbed in the one terrible prospect of losing Harold. I knew mother was freely consenting to it. It seemed incredible to me that she *could* do so ; and now that I have stolen quietly away without disturbing them, and am once more alone in my own little room, I do not, *cannot* believe she will really yield, and feel sure she will withdraw her consent, after a night's meditation on what it will be to be without him. Harold will, I know, yield his will to hers, however strong his desires to the contrary may be.

"I cannot kneel to say my prayers while my thoughts are in such a whirl, neither dare I go to rest without giving myself up to my Father's care. Oh that I loved Him more! this bitter trial would then have been easier to bear. Can it be that it is *He* who demands this great sacrifice? Oh, it is *too* much; anything else I could yield submissively, but not Harold, my own, my only brother! Yet God gave His only Son, His well-beloved, His daily delight; and Christ gave Himself, freely, willingly, for rebellious sinners. And why? Because He *so* loved. Ah, there it is again! I do not love enough; I scarcely love at all, or I should submit willingly. 'O God, to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy Name through Christ our Lord!'

* * * * *

"Things look brighter in the freshness of first awaking, and I have determined to reason with Harold once more. When he sees it breaks my heart he must give it up. I shall go to him at once; there he is passing by the window. I flew down stairs the moment I perceived him, and rushed out by the glass door. Harold was walking thoughtfully up and down the garden walk, his eyes fixed on the ground. I paused for one moment, my heart all aglow at the beauties of the early morning, the dew-drops trembling on the grass, the fresh breeze that blew from the sea, the soft, misty light in the distant horizon. I stood gazing till Harold's walk brought him close to me; I took a step forward, he started, and looked up in surprise.

"'Harold,' I said, putting my arm coaxingly through his, 'I have come out to talk to you a little about ——' I hesitated, for he looked so very grave.

"'Well?'

"The tone of the monosyllable was a little troubled; I thought he guessed what was coming. 'About what you proposed last night,' I continued, trying to look into his half-averted

face. 'I can't believe you really mean it, that you *really* intend going off and leaving ——'

" 'I did, and do mean it, Alice.'

" 'Harold,' said I, speaking solemnly, and looking straight before me, for he had turned towards me, and I could not meet his eye, 'would you persist in going even if it were to break my heart?'

" He was silent.

" 'For it would break my heart; I know it, I feel it. I should pine away and die, and then mother would be left childless.'

" The dreadful picture I had conjured up brought tears into my eyes.

" 'You talk like a child, Allie,' he answered reproachfully. 'I feel I am needed there, I believe I am called to the work; I have not acted hastily; for it has always been my intense desire, my highest ambition. Now that the way has been made plain and open to me, I should not feel justified in refusing the offer, unless mother's wishes put it out of the question. You heard what she said last night; and you know, my little sister, *she* will really feel the separation most, for she is older than you; and besides you may form other ties—new, I mean; she has nothing——'

" 'How *can* you!' I exclaimed, bursting into angry tears; 'I do not believe, if mamma cares for you as I do, she *could* let you go so easily.'

" He let me sob quietly for a minute or two.

" 'I believe she has reason to grieve most of all,' he said at length; 'but the truth is, dear Alice, there is One she loves supremely, and all other affections are merged into that one overflowing, superhuman love.'

" Something in my heart had told me this long ago; I dashed away my tears, and walked on in silence.

" Suppose I *did* give up this scheme,' said Harold, after a long pause; 'imagine such a thing for a moment, Alice, do you think you would feel happier?'

"I neither could nor would reply, and he went on pleading,

"‘Don’t you think, when you read of the dearth of workers abroad, the vast fields to be supplied with grain now lying waste and desert, the thousands that perish day by day without so much as hearing whether there be any salvation for fallen man—would you not feel that you had been instrumental in keeping back a labourer from the vineyard, a soldier from the battle ——’

"‘I should give money,’ I said, ‘anything, everything, all I had, to send others ; but I would never let *you* go.’

"‘It is not easy to find men willing or qualified for such work,’ he said, sighing ; ‘and though your money is necessary, and your prayers still more so, still, Alice, you would not wish, like some of old, to keep back *part* of the price.’

"There was nothing to be said but to repeat my childish threat. ‘Very well, if you go, I shall pine away.’

"‘You will not do anything so wrong, so wicked.’

"‘It is not wicked,’ I returned sharply. ‘I shall not be able to prevent it.’

"‘You do not seem to desire or intend to prevent it,’ he said. ‘On the contrary, you seem determined to——’

"‘To die,’ I said, supplying his broken sentence, calmly and coolly ; ‘there is no use in trying to resist fate.’

"‘Fate !’ he repeated, ‘what is that ?’

"My tears were coming again ; I drew my arm out of his to dash them away. He stopped, turned, and catching both my hands in his, looked earnestly into my face.

"‘Alice,’ he said, with a wistful tenderness that thrilled to my very heart, ‘we are not speaking rightly about this, and I fear we shall both regret it by-and-by.’

"I tried to pull my hands away, and hide my flushed, tearful face ; but he would not let me.

"‘Dearest,’ he continued, in the same kind, soft tone, ‘you think I am wilful and selfish in going away, and causing you and mother so much pain ; but do you never think what the

separation will be to me? what it will be to part from those I love, and go into exile?’

“I don’t believe I had thought of this; but I said nothing.

“‘It is our Father who asks this great sacrifice of us; our Triune God, who so loves us; our Saviour, who yielded up His own life to redeem us. *He* calls me to leave kinsfolk, home, all that is most precious to me here below, to go and endure hardship, toil, and labour in a far distant land. He calls mother to give up her only son, and she obeys Him—oh, so freely, so entirely, so lovingly! It is a pattern to us both, Alice—and He calls you to yield me up, not to mourn, or die, or pine away, as you have just said, but to surrender cheerfully, wholly, meekly, to His all-wise will; to exert yourself to be to our mother even more than you have ever been; to supply as much as lies in your power the vacant place to her, that while she has yielded a son to the Lord, she may be repaid tenfold by a daughter’s increased devotion and affection; and above all, Alice, to live more entirely to and for God Himself. Believe me, every sacrifice we yield to God knits the heart more closely to Him. We often need to have a loved one taken away to prove to us how entirely and fully our God can supply *all* our need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’

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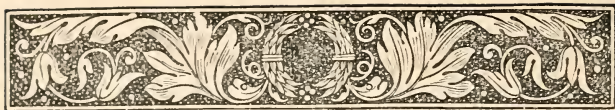
“He is gone! He left this morning early, and for a time I really felt as if my heart would break. There is such an utter blank in the house without him, that sometimes I can scarcely realize that the afternoon train will not bring him back as usual. When the bitter truth that he will not return dawns on my mind, it seems almost unbearable; but I am trying hard, oh, so hard! to obey his last wishes, and there are moments when I feel I am gaining my reward.

“I see my presence is a comfort to mamma, and I try to be cheerful and pleasant as I can: her humility and patience are a help to me. It was beautiful to see how she bore the parting, and yet she told me she was once even more wilful than I am.

This makes me more hopeful of some time attaining to her perfect submission and trust ; and when I gaze on her sweet, gentle face, I think what indomitable power the free grace of God exercises on the human heart, and I pray more and more earnestly for a greater measure of it. I am learning to depend on it more entirely ; for if I begin for a moment to have confidence in myself I am sure to fall.

“It is nearly five hours since Harold left ; but I can say even now, ‘It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes.’ How much more when I shall hear some day of the progress and success of my brother’s work abroad ; and though my poor heart may often yearn for him, I will yield him freely to my Lord and Saviour.”





CHAPTER XXV.

CLOUDY DAYS.

Zealous Zec.

THAT evening Augustus was crossing the lawn, when Rolf came from the garden, driving a wheelbarrow. Augustus slowly advanced towards him; and Rolf, stopping short, looked earnestly and enquiringly into his face. There was no more impatience or anger in its expression now, softened as it was by deep, heartfelt sorrow; and instead of rushing off as usual, Rolf stood still as he approached, and respectfully touched his hat. A gratified look lit up Augustus's face; he nodded and smiled slightly as he passed quietly on towards the house, and peace between him and Rolf was made at last.

At the hall door Ada met him with a face of great importance.

"Katie is quite ill," she said in a quick, fussy tone. "Nurse is attending to mamma, who is lying down again; one of her terrible headaches has come on; so I am to attend to Katie. Be sure you don't make a noise, Gus."

"I'm not likely to," said Augustus sadly.

"I hope Tom and Alfie will be very quiet too. You ought to look after them."

"I must see Katie first. Where is she?"

"Lying on the bed in her room. Oh, don't go near her! you'll disturb her so, and perhaps make her cry again."

"She is not really ill, is she?"

"Oh, I don't know! Nobody can ever tell when a person is not well what it may turn to."

Augustus whistled softly to himself, and went into the house, followed by Ada on tiptoe.

"Well, Katie," he said, kissing the child's flushed cheek, "what's the row with you?"

"I am so tired crying, Gus; my head aches a little, and I want to go to sleep."

"She does not know what is the matter with her," said Ada solemnly; "no one does."

"But I am not really ill," said the child, raising her head from the pillow in surprise.

"Oh, don't move!" cried Ada. "I have tucked you in so nicely; you must lie perfectly still."

"I can't," said Katie, tossing her long dark hair over the coverlet.

"Gus, go away at once," said Ada authoritatively; "you make the child as naughty as she can possibly be."

"Well, Ada, if I were ill I would not be fussed over by you for anything," he said, shrugging his shoulders, and leaving the room.

He met nurse on the stairs, and enquiring for his stepmother, heard that her head was much better, and she hoped to come down later in the evening.

Augustus, feeling very disconsolate, went into the empty drawing-room, and there dozed and read till it grew quite dusk.

Then Mrs. Stanton and Tom came in, and jumping up, he drew the sofa forward for her, and stirred the fire into a bright blaze. The warm glow lit up the pretty room, and made it look pleasant and cheerful.

"How are you now, mamma?" he asked.

"Much better, thank you. Alfie, dear child, what is the matter?"

"Oh, mamma!" cried little Alfred, running in, sobbing all the way, "will Katie really die?"

"My dear boy, what put such an idea into your little head? I was in Katie's room as I came down, and she was looking very well, and fast asleep."

"Ada said she was so ill," said Alfred, trying to stifle his sobs.

"Yes," observed Augustus, "she has been making the greatest fidget about her, and putting on such a long face; no wonder Alf. was quite frightened."

Ada entered the room as he spoke, and caught the last few words.

"Illness is a very serious thing, is it not, mamma?" she said in an aggrieved tone.

"Sometimes, Ada; but not in your little sister's case. She had gone through a great deal all day, and was completely worn out with grief; she only needed a little quiet sleep, which I was glad to see she is enjoying now."

"Nurse put her into my care," said Ada in her consequential manner, "and so I wanted her to be kept perfectly quiet, and Gus would come upstairs and be in the way."

"Do you know, Ada dear, that nursing requires learning and practice, like everything else, to become perfect? and while a neglectful, careless nurse is a very bad thing, an over-zealous attendant is often quite as trying to an invalid."

"I can't help being in earnest in whatever I undertake," said Ada.

"Yes, being in earnest in the right way; but misdirected zeal in any matter is a bad thing."

"Zeal would do for Z," hinted Gus, with an enquiring glance at his stepmother.

"Yes," she answered, with a sad, sad smile, "we must have our last story; so I shall call it

Zealous Zoe.

“They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”—ROMANS x. 2.

“Zealous Zoe sat nestled cozily in the straw at the bottom of Farmer Jones’s big waggon. Every turn of the great lumbering wheels, every step of the five rough-coated plough-horses, was bringing her nearer home—nearer to father, mother, Titus, Janie, and little Arthur. No wonder the round black hat popped up from time to time, and a pair of bright enquiring eyes took a long look around. Ah, there was the little brook gurgling over the stones by the wayside, that by-and-by would become the pretty quiet river that flowed through her own village. That purple mist along the horizon was the Foxborough Hills, that looked so green and well-wooded from her own cottage window. Hard by stood Dr. Hammond’s new house, looking fresh, white, and quite finished now. Zoe remembered it had been surrounded by scaffolding when she went away.

“Many changes were visible to those quick, observant eyes as she jolted along; but no alteration or improvement had been so great or so wonderful as that which had taken place in Zoe’s own heart during those two months’ absence.

“She had left home a pleasant, thoughtless, merry little girl, for a visit to a kind aunt, who lived in a large manufacturing town many miles off; and she was now returning a soldier of the cross, having suffered some defeats, and yet coming off more than conqueror in many a hard-fought battle through the power of Him who led her.

“After each eager scrutiny of the surrounding landscape, Zoe leant back against her rustling couch of straw, and pictured her arrival over and over again: mother’s pleased face, father’s strong arm round her as she jumped down from the waggon, Titus’ almost throttling embrace, Janie capering on the threshold, and baby Arthur crowing lustily in mother’s arms. ‘I must be true to my great Captain,’ mused this eager little warrior, ‘and persuade

them all to enlist. How little they know about the warfare ! Perhaps Titus won't listen to me, he is so wilful ; but Janie will be sure to mind every word I say, and my example may lead Titus. I wonder does mother think much of these things ? and father too ? I have heard them say, "The minister preached a wonderful good sermon," or something of that sort ; but I don't think they know anything about being soldiers.'

"So the big cart rumbled on, and the village came in sight, looking very clean and pretty in the slanting beams of the setting sun. The waggon stopped at the end of the green lane that led to Zoe's home. The farmer good-naturedly offered to carry her little box to the cottage, and shouldering it as if it were a mere plaything, let down the backboard with a clanging noise, and with the other strong arm lifted Zoe to the ground. Stiff and cramped as she felt at first from remaining so long in one position, she contrived to skip along quickly enough to keep up with her companion's long strides, and they soon reached the pretty little cottage. The farmer laid down her trunk on the top of the low garden wall, and wishing her 'good-night,' walked off. Zoe hardly replied, she was so eagerly unfastening the gate. How quiet the place was ! Could it be possible they had not got her aunt's letter, and were therefore not expecting her ? She smiled to herself at the surprise she would give them, raised the latch, and went in.

"The kitchen fire was burning brightly, the table in the centre of the room was laid for supper ; but there was no one there, only the big black cat lay snoring on the hearthrug. Zoe went to the little wash-house beyond, but it was dark and empty ; she put her head into the best parlour with no better success, and then climbed the narrow stairs to the rooms above. Here there was a gleam of light, and a sound of earnest whispering that sent a chill into Zoe's beating heart. The door of her mother's room opened softly, and Titus came out. He stopped short, with a low exclamation of surprise as the stream of light that issued from the doorway revealed his sister.

“‘What’s the matter?’ whispered Zoe tremulously, looking anxiously into his tear-stained face.

“He led her downstairs without answering a word.

“‘Do tell me, Titus!’ she implored, as they entered the deserted kitchen.

“‘You didn’t get the letter?’

“‘No; what letter?’

“‘Mother wrote last night to Aunt Jane, to ask her to keep you on for a bit longer; but I was afraid it would be late for post, and that you would come.’

“This was certainly very unlike the welcome she had expected.

“‘Why shouldn’t I come?’ she asked, looking hurt; ‘couldn’t I help to—but what is it, Titus? Who’s ill? You have not told me.’

“‘Scarlet fever,’ said Titus, looking into the fire with a grave, sad face. ‘Arthur has caught it too; but—but Janie—’

“‘What, oh what?’

“‘The doctor says’—Titus hid his face in his coat sleeve, and began to sob violently—‘he says there isn’t no chance for her, she’s—she’s—’ He could say no more, but sank into a chair, and leaning his head on his hands, burst out crying.

“Here was an opportunity for Zoe’s new service and energy to be exercised with advantage. She quite overlooked her brother’s grief at Janie’s dangerous condition, in her eagerness to prove herself the most efficient and useful member of the family.

“‘I shall go up and help to nurse her,’ she said with decision; ‘and Titus, you go and bring in my box; Mr. Jones left it outside.’

“But her brother did not seem to hear her last mandate. He had started up at her first words.

“‘You mustn’t,’ he said earnestly; ‘indeed you mustn’t, Zoe. Mrs. Sims has no children; she might give you a bed for a day or two. Come along; I’ll go with you, and ask her.’

“‘Indeed, I’ll do no such thing!’ she answered hotly. ‘It

is very unfair to try to banish me like that, when I only want to be a help and comfort to mother. Besides, what a cowardly thing it would be to run away from illness.'

" 'Discretion is the best part of valour,' said Titus.

" 'You got *that* out of your old copy-books,' retorted Zoe; 'and my wish to do good comes from reading a far, far better book, the best of all, the Bible.'

" 'The fifth commandment is in the Bible,' returned Titus; 'and I know mother does not want you to run the risk of catching the fever.'

" 'She does not wish *you* to get it either, does she?'

" 'The doctor said last night it was too late for precautions. I've been with Janie all along.'

" 'Well, you might be so obliging as to bring in my trunk, at all events.'

" Titus got up in silence, and went out.

" Now was the moment for decisive action. She had always been rather afraid of this big brother; and the instant his back was turned she ran upstairs, and without stopping to knock, turned the handle in the lock, and went in.

" Mother was sitting by the fire, with Arthur asleep in her arms; father was standing by Janie's little cot, bathing her forehead. The room was profoundly still. Every one but the sleeping babe looked up at her sudden entrance. Her mother seemed frightened and distressed; Janie's heavy, dull eyes gleamed with no look of recognition; her father raised his disengaged hand, and peremptorily motioned her to the door. But Zoe took no heed of the gesture; she ran hastily forward, and before any one could stop her, was bending over her little sister, and kissing her repeatedly. A strong hand was laid upon her arm, and in a low hoarse whisper her father ordered her to go away.

" 'Oh, father!' she exclaimed, bursting into tears; she doesn't seem to know me; what shall I do? Oh, mother, isn't it dreadful?'

"The noise raised Janie from the stupor; she gazed wildly round, and laughed unmeaningly, clapping her little hands. Baby awoke at the same moment and began to roar. Zoe dared no longer to disobey the stern glance of her father's eyes; she retreated to the door, and crept down stairs, to meet Titus's reproachful face at the bottom of the flight. He passed her by without speaking, and went up, while she came into the lonely kitchen. The disturbance she had caused was still audible upstairs, and she felt weary, ill at ease, and illused.

"'Every one is so full of their own usefulness and importance,' she muttered to herself, 'that they'll give place to no one else. Poor dear little Janie, I only wish I knew she was a soldier of the cross, for then she would go to heaven when she died; I must try and get a chance of speaking to her.'

"But that night she saw no one again; she partook of the neglected supper, knelt down and said her prayers earnestly and attentively, and then lay down on the settle by the fire and fell asleep.

"The cold grey dawn of an autumn morning was just breaking over the hills when she awoke shivering; the fire had smouldered away, the white ashes on the unswept hearth looked dreary and untidy. Her mother's shawl hung behind the door, and Zoe wrapped it round her, raised the latch, and went out through the little garden she had entered so gladly the day before.

"As she ran up and down the lane to warm herself, the sound of approaching wheels startled her, and the next moment the doctor's gig bowled lightly past her. She saw that her father was seated by him in the front seat, while the groom sat behind. It was evident her father must have passed through the kitchen while she lay there asleep. She continued her walk, and did not come in till hunger reminded her it was long past the usual breakfast hour. She found Titus in the kitchen when she entered, blowing some lighted sticks in the grate.

"'Is the doctor gone?' she asked.

“He nodded his head.

““What did he say about them?”

““Arthur the same; Janie worse.”

“Zoe sighed, and remained silent for a minute or two.

““Titus,” she asked at length, “do you think Janie is prepared?”

““Little pet; she was always better than any of us.”

““Yes; but that does not do. She must have faith, and enlist ——”

““I know, I know. Oh, don’t go on, Zoe!”

““Does the minister ever come?”

““He won’t be home till Saturday; his sister’s ill.”

““Does father ever ——”

““Oh, she can’t hear—know—understand, Zoe. I wish you would look after things down here; I’m wanting above.”

“He handed her the bellows, and went off. Zoe blowed away rather indignantly. ‘He’s so wonderfully important, he can’t tell me a word. I must find out for myself before another day passes.’

“But that day passed, and another, and another, and still Zoe was not permitted to see her sister. It was a hard trial for the little soldier to bear. She had returned home so earnest, so zealous, to serve her Master, with such firm resolutions to lead all those she loved to enlist in His glorious service, and now all zeal and energy was fading away, and Zoe was relapsing into her old ways of carelessness and selfishness. If asked the cause of this declension, she would have been quick enough to answer, that she felt as truly in earnest as ever, but how was she to testify her fervent zeal without someone or something to expend it upon? Father and mother could think of nothing but their sick children; Titus was disagreeably full of self-importance and conceit; and she was left alone with no one to work for, no one to aid.

“Once Zoe looked round on the empty kitchen as she thought of this, and a tiresome voice within obtruded itself on

her notice, and whispered, 'How much there is to be done, little Zoe, if you will only follow the path of plain duty your Lord has opened before you, instead of feeling annoyed because your self-chosen path is blocked up and impassable at present!' but she would not listen to it, though she could not help wondering how they lived upstairs. Titus came down, and fetched things away from time to time that she knew her mother must cook and prepare before it could be eaten; and how much trouble she could have saved had she made little tempting things for the sick-room, and sent them up by him carefully and well cooked! also, how much it would have contributed to her father's comfort to have had a clean, pleasant kitchen, and a cheerful, loving little daughter to greet him when he came down dejected and weary in mind and body, instead of an untidy, neglected room, and a gloomy, discontented little face! how much she would have heard of all that went on upstairs, had she met Titus with a bright face when he appeared, and tried to share his cares! These and many other kind and helpful things could Zealous Zoe have done with all her heart, mind, and strength, as unto her great Captain Himself; for was not this sad return home sent by an All-wise Hand to exercise and try her good resolutions?

"But Zoe would not use these golden opportunities of service, and soon, by her own act of wilfulness and imprudence, they were to be taken away from her. Baby got well, and little Janie was better. The weary, anxious parents once more gathered their little flock round the large kitchen table, and all thanked God together for His many mercies to them.

"But the following week the insidious illness struck Zoe in her full health and strength, and she lay in the same room above, unconscious and delirious. How tenderly she was nursed, and with what relief and gratitude the poor parents at length heard her pronounced out of danger!

"'Janie,' she said to the little sister who was sitting beside her one evening, 'what a dreadful thing it is to be ill!'

“Janie nodded her cropped head sagely.

“‘Were you ever frightened?’ asked Zoe after a pause, ‘I mean at dying.’

“‘Yes; one night,’ said Janie, a bright colour suffusing her pale cheeks; ‘father spoke to me about our Saviour taking little children in His arms, and blessing them; and I felt so weak and bad, I asked him if I should never get better.’

“‘What did he say?’ interposed Zoe eagerly.

“‘He said, perhaps the Lord Jesus would spare me to him a little longer; for he had asked Him to do so if it was His will; but if not, I should be taken away from him, and then ——’

“‘Well?’ broke in Zoe again.

“‘Father talked to me,’ pursued the child with tears in her eyes, ‘and when I knew Jesus had died to save me, and wash me from my very own sins, I wasn’t frightened; I prayed Him to be very near me, and—and—He was.’

“Zoe gazed at her earnestly. ‘I was rather frightened last Sunday, Janie, I was so weak, and burning hot, and somehow I wasn’t quite happy. I knew our Saviour had died for me, and I trusted I was His soldier; for at Aunt Jane’s I asked Him to take me into His army; but, oh, I felt I had done nothing for Him, and it troubled me; for I had meant to do so much! but all the time you were ill I was idle and careless, and of no use to any one. I long to be well again, I would act so differently. I feel full of burning love to Him. When I think of all He has done and suffered for me, it makes me feel quite cross and impatient at being so weak and good-for-nothing as I am now; for I long, long, *long* to do everything I can to please and serve Him.’

“Her father came in while she was speaking, and caught the last few words.

“‘Well, my little girlie,’ he said cheerfully and kindly, ‘I love to hear you say that you long, long, long to please our dear Lord and Master; but I don’t like to hear the putting into practice of your good desires postponed even for an hour.’

“‘But I must wait till I feel stronger. What can I do, father, lying here unable to move? I can’t even read or work.’

“‘My dear, whose will is it that you should be weak and helpless?’

“‘God’s will,’ said Zoe softly.

“‘And does my eager little daughter think that God will require active service of His young soldier, while He has placed her in a position wherein it is impossible to render it to Him?’

“Zoe looked puzzled.

“‘Ah, Zoe!’ said her father, seating himself by her bedside; ‘did you ever read in history, that during a great warfare in a hostile land a skilful general leads some regiments to the van, where they rush at once into the heat and turmoil of the strife, while others are ordered to the outposts, to stand on guard, and watch against the foe, lest some ambush from the rear should overtake them? Suppose these sentinels should, in their craving for adventurous exploits, mutiny on account of the inactive service appointed them, and rebel because a quieter duty had been wisely assigned them. Suppose they threw down their weapons, and laid aside their armour, protesting it was useless, where would be the discipline of the army?’

“‘But, father,’ she pleaded, ‘I could not bear to be a lukewarm, half-hearted soldier; I want to be zealous and earnest in His work.’

“‘You want to be zealous, Zoe, but only in your own way, not in His. You want to rush to the forefront of the battle, and smite and slay the enemy; but He wills that you should tread bravely and watchfully your little sentry-beat, keeping your armour bright, and slaying every spy and straggler from the hosts of the enemy, such as Murmuring, Impatience, Discontent, &c. If His orders to you were to rush forward, and strike the foe to the ground, you would obey joyfully. My zealous Zoe must pray to be enabled to submit to Him with equal alacrity, when His command is to “*Stand*, having your

loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness ; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."''"





CHAPTER XXVI.

HAPPINESS AGAIN.

THE next evening was cold and rainy; the children were all gathered in the drawing-room with Mrs. Stanton, some trying to read by the fading light, others sitting silent and absorbed in thought round the fire. Alfred was lying on the rug, leaning his curly head against his stepmother's knee as she sat in a low arm-chair with Katie on her lap. The child's dark head rested on one arm, and with the other hand she lightly touched Alfred's brow, or twined his hair round her slender fingers.

The house was very still, but the heavy rain came beating in gusty showers against the window-panes, and the light waned till Augustus was obliged to throw aside his book, and join the circle round the fire.

"How dismal the room looks," he said, shivering. "Do poke up the fire, Ada."

His sister stirred the fire into a blaze, and Mrs. Stanton roused herself from her long reverie to make some remark, but presently relapsed into silence again; and the children, observing her drooping attitude, pensive eyes, and dejected, patient expression, spoke together in whispers, which, notwithstanding their best endeavours to the contrary, were perfectly audible.

"I wish papa had never gone to that horrid war. Mamma will never be happy again."

"Hush!" for large tears were gathering slowly on Mrs. Stanton's long lashes, and falling one by one upon her cheek.

"Mamma is too good not to be happy," said Ada; "but, oh dear, I hate to see her grieved!"

Alfred softly drew down the hand which was still mechanically playing with his curls, and kissed it lovingly.

"I wish I could get a shot at the fellows who killed papa," muttered Augustus.

As he spoke the door opened, and Grimes came in.

"Please, 'm, Jessie Leonard and her brother are here, and want to see one of the young gentlemen or ladies."

"I'll go," said Augustus, starting up. "Where are they, Grimes?"

"Just here, sir, standing in the hall."

He left the room, and was surprised to see the eager expression of Rolf's usually quiet face, while Jessie's was wreathed with smiles.

"Please, sir," she said, her eyes sparkling with excitement and delight, "mother said as we was to come down to tell you that father came home quite unexpected this evening; he's got a good situation in a factory near Wolverhampton, and we'se all a-going off to live there."

"That *will* be nice for you," said Augustus warmly, while he answered Rolf's intelligent glance with a little nod and smile of congratulation.

"How happy your mother must be."

"Mother doan't look the same," said Jessie joyfully; "you'd scarce know her, sir, she be as light-hearted as a lark, that she be." And she looked for confirmation of her assertion to Rolf, who, without hearing her words, apparently guessed their purport, and bobbed his head emphatically.

"Well, I am very glad you came to tell us," said Augustus, as the little visitors turned to go. "I shall let all the others know; they will be so pleased."

"Thank 'e kindly, sir ; and thank the lady, and everyone for their goodness to us."

With a smile and courtesy, and a sign to Rolf, who pulled the front lock of his hair, the two children took their departure.

Augustus turned toward the drawing-room, and the smile that had lit up his face died suddenly away. How hard it seemed to come back again to the little group of mourners, with such news as this ; but it must be done sooner or later, and turning the handle of the door which he had been holding hesitatingly in his hand, he came in, saying quietly,

"Rolf and Jessie came to tell us that their father has come home."

Mrs. Stanton's sad face brightened with unselfish pleasure.

"I am very glad for them, poor children," she said.

"How delighted poor Mrs. Leonard must be !" said Ada.

"Yes," said Augustus ; "she had not a line from him for such ages, she had almost given up hope of his being alive."

"They are all overflowing with happiness," said Tom mournfully, "and we ——"

He stopped short, for Mrs. Stanton laid Katie gently on the ground, and had risen from her chair. Her face was deadly pale, her lips parted for a moment, as if about to speak ; but unable to control her agitation, she turned away in silence, and left the room, intending to seek the solitude of her own sitting-room, and there give vent to the grief so long restrained for the children's sakes, which now seemed to overwhelm her.

But as she crossed the hall, there were hurried footsteps approaching, and unwilling to meet the servant's gaze, she hastily escaped into the dining-room.

As she stood waiting in the darkness the door opened, and a tall man, wrapped in a military overcoat, entered the room, while one of the servants said in a suppressed voice, "Step in here, sir, for one moment ; I'll tell Mrs. Stanton ; or perhaps I could manage to see Master Augustus, he would break it more gently to her."

Mrs. Stanton never doubted but that this was some officer in her husband's regiment, come to confirm the fatal tidings ; perhaps entrusted with some last message of farewell.

"I am here," she said quietly, while every nerve thrilled with a new sense of horror and despair ; "I will hear what you have to tell me of my husband, sir."

The stranger made no reply, and thinking that he feared to tell her the worst, she continued, still maintaining outward composure, though her low voice quivered and shook with the strong effort of self-control, "I believe I know all ; do not be afraid to speak. Perhaps you have a letter, a message, a last word, which you are come to tell me ; if so, I shall indeed thank you ; it will be a consolation in my great, my utter loneliness."

Her voice faltered as she spoke the last word with an agony of suppressed sorrow that thrilled to the heart of the listener. He took a step forward, murmuring,

"Minnie !"

She started, clasped her hands together, while her breath came in short, choking sobs.

"Minnie, my wife !"

The next instant she was in his arms, clinging to him in a wild intensity of joy that was almost pain, still oppressed by those tearless sobs.

He soothed her with many a tender word, and she lay in his arms, quieting down into perfect happiness. She did not ask a question. It was enough to feel his arms around her, to listen to and join in his fervent thanksgiving at their reunion.

But she soon started up, accusing herself of selfishness. Would he come into the drawing-room, or should she announce his arrival to the children ? He said he would go in with her. He could not bear to lose sight of her even for that brief moment, and did not fear that joy would hurt the younger ones. Still, he was scarcely prepared for the shout of gladness that

rose on his entrance, as all the children rushed up to him in wild delight, clinging to his arms and legs, and almost stifling him with embraces. He was well pleased, however; and as he instantly marked the improvement in the looks, tones, and manners of them all, he gazed at his wife with a glance that plainly said, "This is the effect of your sweet influence, my Minnie."

What a happy evening it was! Mrs. Stanton's face was beaming with wondrous brightness as she hovered round her husband, attending to his wants, and listening to his explanations. The officer killed in the skirmish was a Colonel Strahan, whose name was by a misprint announced as Stanton. Captain Stanton was at the time on board ship, and near home, having caught fever soon after landing on the tropical shore, and been at once despatched home, with some other invalids. When sufficiently recovered, he had written to his wife; but the letter had evidently gone astray, and once landed safe on British ground, he had travelled night and day, and arrived at Oxon-down that evening by the same train that he and his bride had returned home by some months before.

The children did not at all wish to go to bed that night, and Mrs. Stanton was indulgently forgetful of the hour; but when her gentle reminder was at last spoken, "good-nights" were instantly exchanged, and once more, as they left the room, Captain Stanton's eye sought his wife's, with a glance that more than compensated to her for her many little troubles and difficulties in so training her stepchildren.

"You are a magician," he said, drawing her nearer to him; "you have converted a bear-garden into a field of lambs, free, happy, and obedient. What magic have you used?"

"None," she answered, smiling. "I began loving them for your sake, now I also love them for their own."

Captain Stanton then asked for some particulars of Aunt Charlotte's death.

"But one cannot wish her back," he said, when he had heard

all. Rest came at length, and was welcome to her ; may we all so live that our treasure may be above."

"I do think," said Ada decidedly, as they went upstairs, "that we have the most beautiful mamma. Did you see how lovely she looked to-night? I know what my ambition is now; it is to be like her."

"Hers is the best kind of beauty," said Augustus.

"It is that nice soft look in her eyes ——"

"It is her mouth," interrupted Tom; "it is always ready to smile, and to say something sweet."

"I think it is her hands, always ready to do something kind," chimed in Katie.

"It is just her whole self," summed up Alfred. "No one ever had such a papa and mamma as we have."

* * * * * *

Do all the young readers of these little stories know what is meant by the Christian warfare? Do they understand it, not with the head only, but also down deep, *deep* in the heart?

In one way it is not difficult for well-taught children to know what it means; and when asked they would cry readily enough, "Why, the good Captain is our Lord Jesus Christ; His wicked enemy is the devil; the world is the battle-field, and we all are His soldiers." *His* soldiers? Whose? Ah, that is the question every little child must ask his own heart; and not only *ask*, and perhaps even wonder a little to whom he belongs, and then dismiss the idea, and forget all about it, but seek to get an answer to it.

Whose soldier? Think of it for a few moments. You are not, you cannot be neutral; that is, belonging neither to one army or the other. Every day of your young life you are giving up your time, your strength, your abilities, your affections, either to the Prince of Peace or to the prince of the power of the air; either loitering on the great battle-plain in carelessness and sin, decoying by your bad example the Captain's little

soldiers from their allegiance, or you are striving against your many failings, fighting your besetting faults beneath the glorious banner of your Saviour's love, clad in His brilliant armour, your happy little faces steadfastly fixed, and your steps resolutely bent towards His kingdom of everlasting peace and joy.



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JW



